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THE CLAIMS OF POLITICS

IN the present social atmosphere the invitation to express political conviction and engage in political action grows more and more insistent. To have given much of one's time to ' culture '—in the sense of literature, the arts, and in general the finer developments of human possibility—is not readily accepted as a reason for political non-commitment ; often, in fact, it is taken to carry with it special political obligations. Whether these special obligations exist, and if so what they consist in, are the chief questions dealt with in the following symposium.

The editors were anxious to assemble as representative a set of opinions as possible, but had some disappointments, especially in regard to a promised Marxist contribution.

RICHARD CHURCH

The Individual and Politics.

Only the criminal, or the person with a sick mind, will deny that every man and woman is under an obligation to serve the community in some way or other. That sounds an obvious statement. But the implications are not so obvious. For one thing, everybody at some time is in a pathological condition, during which he rebels against his duty, and doses himself with cynicism in order to relieve the pain in his social conscience.

It might be useful to say something about this condition, for I believe it is a fairly common symptom amongst the middle-aged, the generation to which I belong. It is an interesting generation because it caught the brunt of the activities, or at least the immediate activities, during the last war. The seeds of social malaise were laid then. They are sprouting now.

If a man has had a wound, he evolves a semi-conscious technique of gestures to protect the tender spot from all contacts. He does the same thing if his mind has been wounded. The callous flesh causes a paradoxical reaction of hyper-sensitiveness. The tendency is to avoid touching things. Society, and all the obligations it entails, is a very hard and knobbly thing. Men and women

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between the ages of forty and fifty shrink from that contact. They have a sort of fixation arising from the painful memories of what was demanded from them in 1914-1918.

In addition, people reaching this time of life have a more natural tendency towards inaction and withdrawal. The fires of youth are waning, its ideals and enthusiasms burned out. Once that happens, it is impossible for an honest person to go on believing in generalizations and all those crude categories on which young people built their political faiths. It is then that he begins to waver. He is not shown much mercy by the generation treading on his heels. ' Just for a handful of silver he left us,' said Browning of Wordsworth. But it is not so simple as that. The trouble is that nothing is simple, as the maturing mind begins to discover. The issues between political parties are discovered to be unreal issues, the aims of political parties to be unreal aims.

It is noticed by the temporarily cynical adult that social crusades are often led by scoundrels, and reactionary movements by men of charm and integrity. He observes too that some of the most socialistic legislation is put through by Conservative Governments (look for instance at the work being done by Sir Samuel Hoare to-day in the Department of the Home Office). As against this, I recollect that during my quarter of a century in the Civil Service, most of it spent in the Ministry of Labour, I saw two Labour Governments in office. During those periods all progress was arrested in the Department. It was a very disillusioning experience. But for that matter, to serve in a Government department is always a disillusioning experience. One sees the politicians behind the scenes. One has to wash their dirty linen in private. It is rather a disgusting occupation.

I do not exaggerate when I say that I believe demagogues to belong to the criminal class. They are parasites who make nothing and produce nothing, except trouble and despair. And what is so depressing is that Trades Unions seem to be a breeding ground for this particular type of politician. That is why the Labour Party is such a sorry spectacle to-day. That is why, too, the enraged person who wants to get on with the job of social building is almost inclined to turn to syndical-anarchism, as a system which openly proposes to do away with the professional politician and all his *words*. Guild socialism is now a museum

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piece. Scientific necessity has passed it by. But I believe it contains the nucleus of common-sense practicalness out of which a modern state will be able to function handsomely and smoothly and at the same time advance the liberties of the individual. What is so galling is that at the present moment, the totalitarian régimes are experimenting with the doctrines of guild socialism and perverting them toward the suppression of individuality. Now that the purposes of war are being forced upon the democracies, they too are experimenting in the same direction, but alas with the same results. And this is only another example of the confusion between precept and practice.

What is the intelligent individual to make of it all? Where can he find a foothold? The answer is that he has to find many footholds. For a political belief and the conduct consequent upon it are to be compared with a stepping-stone in a series across a river. They are expedients in an activity that is dynamic, not static. A man stands still upon one of these stones only when he is paralysed with fear. That unfortunately is a common condition which overtakes us all when we find ourselves surrounded by the river of events, personalities, accidents and all the other continuously exerted forces. Tolstoi realized the extent of that fear. He wrote ' War and Peace ' trying to show how that fear was the basis of so much hero-worship, self-drugging vanity and obscurantism. Christ saw it and dodged the issue by advising men to ' render unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's."

But the question is, What, and how much, is Cæsar's? We can use any symbol we like, but we cannot escape from the problem. Whether we call the Organized State a Democracy, a Soviet, a Nordic Reich, or the Roman Catholic Church, we still have to make up our minds how much we are prepared to do towards the articulation and functioning of that society. Our decision is important both to ourselves and to the community, because on it depends whether the State is to be a servile one or a benevolent one, and whether the individual is to be fettered or acquiescent. Between these two antinomies lie the problems of to-day ; lie war, lie misery, cynicism, and the eventual decay of human dignity and joy as hitherto recognized.

I therefore have to ask myself how I am to come to that important decision. Am I prepared wilfully to use only a small

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fraction of my intelligence and my experience of life, in order to be able to conform to the mechanical programme of any of the political parties? Do I believe in any political party, or in any political ideology? The answer is that I do not. There is no such thing to believe in. The very word 'politics' implies something that can never be static. I, as a representative figure of citizens of my age, have come to a period of life where I see all definitions of the problems of society as false circumscriptions of the facts involved. Those definitions are made by men as fallible and ignorant as myself. I do not believe them; they are theories, not realities. At the best they are *ad hoc* experiments; measurements of necessity. By the time I have registered my decision to act (or vote) for or against them, they will be obsolete as the moods and events from whose conflict they sprang. I cannot adhere to a particular political issue. But parties exist on such issues. Dictatorships exist on them. In order, therefore, to try and keep up with the needs of reality in government, I must draw nearer to anarchism in my beliefs.

But that is merely laughable, like young love. It is charming, it has about it the qualities of the Golden Age, the morning of life in an under-populated world. We live in an over-populated world, one which is bursting the coat of old cultures and economic necessities. Science is forcing upon us centralization of control. And that tendency affects ideas as well as food supply and other physical factors. This is an age of mass-production. What is the fastidious artist, scientist, or religious initiate to do about it? If he keeps out of the melée, will he escape? Can he find an ivory tower, and if he does will he be bombed or gently taxed out of it? In a world increasingly noisy, standardized, obvious, will he be able to feed his mind on the solitude, the *objets d'art*, the unique experiences which it demands if life is to have any value at all for him?

The answer to that is the usual sly one of the sophisticated mind. The person with developed cultural interests has sufficient knowledge of history to be assured that 'brains count,' that the fastidious person will always be able to slip round the corner out of the noise of the circus, where he can find a meal consisting of something a little more epicurean than bread. This is not said in cynicism or contempt. It is not cynical or contemptuous to know

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that the great majority of mankind is satisfied with the crudest of cultural values. One man's meat will always be another man's poison. It would be hard luck for the small minority if they were not invariably much more clever and unscrupulous than the majority in getting what they want.

That being so, they must be prepared to make certain compromises, even to maintain a society which they see tending more and more towards this dreaded standardization. Even when there is only one make of motor-car in the world ; only one crooner at the earth-central microphone ; only one form of ready-made garment, there will still be some means of exquisite excitement for the subtle-minded to extract from that environment.

There remains meanwhile the needs of common decency ; and that is a moral matter rather than an æsthetic one. No matter how cultured we may be, how esoteric in our tastes, we are dangerous criminals if we remain socially passive while other people are starved by artificial scarcity, robbed of a common birthright by caste distinctions, and denied the right to make their own lives within certain sane limits. To secure the family of mankind against such indignities as these, I must be prepared to put aside my contempt for politicians, my inability to believe that good men always act with justice and scoundrels always with fraud, my lack of faith in static doctrines for the control of dynamic realities. In a word, I must be prepared to give my vote to a political party, and my service if necessary to a bureaucracy. But I consciously refuse to make up my mind which political party it shall be, and what particular department I shall function in. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. And action is always an evil because it cuts out nine-tenths of the truth.

GEOFFREY DAVIES

The subject proposed for discussion is a difficult one and offers two questions.

What is the ideal relationship between the highly cultured expert, poet or priest, and the ideal community?

Secondly, what is the best aim in present circumstances?

The first question is an academic one. It is not possible here to say more than that, even in an ideal state, it is debateable

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whether the man of exceptional talent in matters that do not immediately concern the organization and working of the State, will help the community more by adding his own flavouring to the taste of the whole or by concentrating on the development of his own genius.

A community of ideal administrators that turned out only ideal administrators for the next generation would be as valuable to humanity as an ants' nest.

In the present world, with things as they are, the exceptional man finds himself involved in an acute struggle with the community for the preservation of his own identity. This is obvious in the totalitarian states where the man who is unlike his fellows finds himself faced with unconcealed resentment and hostility. As in Plato's ' Republic ' there is no place for music in the state.

In communities still faintly aristocratic, as in England, the opposition is not so open or obvious but it is very real. The eccentric is still tolerated but it is on the understanding that his eccentricity shall be harmless.

The absolute pacifist, for example, may still preach his views without molestation, but if he attempts to spread their practice by speaking to soldiers, his punishment would be heavy.

The easier, and I think the wrong, solution for the individualist thinker is to let the State go by ; to offer to pay it a reasonable rent in the form of taxes, and the performance of other civic duties, in return for accommodation in his private room where he may work and think unmolested provided he does not annoy the other tenants.

The great objection to this course is that it is a concession to the community which deprives the community of a part of itself and that part the most valuable, and in saying this, the standpoint of the writer must be made clear. It is the old one that the duty of the individual to his fellow men can only be discharged in communities, but the entering into a community and the discharge of that duty are conditional upon the community fulfilling its proper, physical, mental and spiritual functions—the physical well-being of its citizens and the establishment of order and justice ; the spread of education and the cherishing of 'civilized' behaviour ; the encouragement of religion and reconciliation with God.

It is to-day clear, I suppose, to all that our Christian civil-

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ization has somehow taken a wrong turning and as it progresses down the wrong road, puts an increasing strain on the ropes—this is going to be a mixed metaphor—has somehow overgrown itself in the wrong ways and shapes and is putting an increasing strain on its roots.

Since this is so, to remain aloof is to encourage the worse tendencies. It is only postponing the date of reckoning and increasing the chances of defeat.

If these premises are correct, it is the duty of every citizen who, by nature or education, is mentally or spiritually above his neighbours, to continue his own personal development but at the same time to watch every political development around him with the closest attention ; to regard himself as a member of a new Holy Office charged with the combating of the appalling and rampant heresies all around him ; to employ his interest and authority diurnally to the re-tracing of the road and the recognition of reality. This is the duty of them all—a vital duty and, incidentally, one of the reasons why I have written this article.

CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

The expansion of Politics from the narrow limits of utilitarian Liberalism to the all-embracing claims of the totalitarian community-state has already had a revolutionary effect on Western civilization and may produce still greater changes in the future. It threatens to confound and destroy the traditional forms and standards of culture and to reduce it to the crude undifferentiated unity of a mass civilization. The man of letters no less than the philosopher and the religious teacher has lost his former spiritual freedom and is in danger of becoming the conscious or unconscious servant of the ruling powers, whether those powers are the anonymous servants of material interests or the acknowledged leaders of a totalitarian party State.

In these circumstances our primary duty is to keep our heads clear and not allow ourselves to be confused by the over-simplification of the issues which has always been the besetting sin of the political partisan. For though the problems that confront us are new, they are not without analogies in the past. It is not the first time that there has been a conflict between the claims of

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politics and the claims of culture. In the first place it is important to realize the essential disparity of political phenomena. There are at least two distinct types of political interest which can be sharply differentiated. There are professional politics—the business of government ; and there are ideological or spiritual politics—the spirit of loyalty to communal ideals. From one point of view politics are a profession and the politician is a specialist, like an engineer or a financier, whose function it is to transact public business in an efficient and economical manner. But from the other point of view, politics is a mystical vocation, and the politician is the man who is conscious of a mission to save his people or who has the power to inspire men with an enthusiasm for a common ideal.

It is obvious that these two forms of political action have very little in common. A man may be an admirable chairman of committees and yet be quite incapable of making men willing to die for the policy that he favours, while the man who is able to fill his followers with an invincible faith in their common cause, may be entirely incompetent when it comes to practical politics.

It seems to me that a great part of our difficulties is due to the confusion and contamination of these two types of political psychology and political action. For though it is easy to distinguish them in theory, they inevitably tend to overlap in practice. The great statesmen and political leaders—Cromwell, Abraham Lincoln and the rest—have always been the men who were able to combine both functions, to be at once the personal embodiment of communal ideals and the practical organizers of public affairs ; in much the same way as the great Churchmen have been those who managed to unite the essentially dissimilar functions of the ecclesiastical administrator and the religious teacher.

Moreover this duality of political life is not confined to the professional politician ; it is no less apparent in the life of the ordinary man. The latter has to fulfil the practical duties of citizenship. He has to take his part in the business of local government, to vote in elections, to sit on councils and committees and to undertake his share of public burdens. But he also has duties towards the community of a wider and more spiritual kind. These are the virtues of patriotism and devotion to the common good which need not express themselves through any of the recognized

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channels of administrative activity but which are nevertheless the very essence of citizenship. But though these are political virtues, they also transcend politics, since they are directed towards a community which is wider and deeper than the State. Our conception of that community depends on our ideology. If we are Liberals it is Humanity, if we are Conservatives it is the Nation, if we are Communists it is the World Proletariat, if we are Fascists it is the Race. But so far as I know, there is no creed or ideology which makes *the State* the final social end and excludes the concept of a wider community to which our deepest loyalty is due.

It is in this sphere that the main responsibilities of the thinker and the man of letters are to be found. Practical politics are the concern of the practical man, and the business man may be better equipped than the philosopher and the poet to take part in the transaction of public business. But when it comes to the consideration of the final ends of political action, to the criticism of the ideologies on which that action is based and to the creation of a social consciousness and sense of responsibility which transcend the limits of the political community, it is clear that the thinker and the writer have a more important contribution to make than the man of action or the political orator ; and it is their primary function to serve society with intellectual integrity in this sphere rather than to take an active part in party politics or in the actual work of government.

This principle is far from being generally admitted at the present day. The individualism of nineteenth century culture had already effaced the old frontiers between the spiritual and temporal powers and weakened the traditional hierarchy of social and spiritual values, and now the coming of the totalitarian state marks the emergence of a new type of politics which recognizes no limits and seeks to subordinate every social and intellectual activity to its own ends. Thus the new politics are in a sense more idealistic than the old ; they are political religions based on a Messianic hope of social salvation. But at the same time they are more realist since they actually involve a brutal struggle for life between rival powers which are prepared to use every kind of treachery and violence to gain their ends.

It is easy to condemn the dictators and the politicians for thus opening the gates to the flood of evil and violence which

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threatens to overwhelm our civilization. But the primary responsibility does not rest with them: it rests on the intellectuals who prepared the way for them by their theoretic justification of violence and terrorism. It was the Communists who first popularized the new political theory and technique, and the Communists in Russia were *par excellence* the party of the intelligentsia. And on the other side, it was men of letters like Nietzsche and Sorel, Marinetti and D'Annunzio who were the spiritual fathers of Fascism and whose influence transformed a national movement against defeatism and social disorder into a totalitarian cult of the will to power.

If the intellectuals abandon the interests of culture and cease to recognize the primacy of spiritual values, we can hardly expect the politician to do otherwise. Setting aside political Messianism and the exaggerations of totalitarian ideologies, the task of the modern statesman is quite important enough to occupy his whole attention. He is responsible for the safety of the State—*salus reipublicæ*—and we cannot blame him for subordinating everything else to that vital task, any more than we can blame a ship's captain for putting the safety of his vessel before the interests of his passengers. But the State, like the ship, is a means and not an end and though the public interests with which the statesman is charged are vital to the existence of the community, they are not its only interests or even its highest interests. The intellectual, on the other hand, is the servant of those wider interests which transcend the sphere of politics. He works not merely for the State but for the community of thought which extends far beyond the limits of any single political society.

The trouble is that this conception of a community of thought has never received adequate treatment from modern social theorists. Either it has been rationalized by the philosophers into a universal ideal which has no sociological content, or it has been regarded as the ideological aspect of the political and economic society which is the ultimate reality. But any serious historian, and most of all the historian of literature, must realize that there is a community of thought, which, no less than the political society, is the result of historical development, but which has its own laws of growth that are not limited by political or even racial frontiers. For example, mediæval Christendom and mediæval China formed two distinct and independent communities of thought, and the fact that

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the Mongol Empire united Russia and China in one political system did little or nothing to bind these two spiritual worlds together. On the other hand modern Europe and modern America do not form two separate communities of thought in spite of their differences of culture and their political independence. English and American literature are mutually dependent, and religious and intellectual movements which have their origin on one side of the Atlantic may have as much influence on the other side of the ocean as in the land of their origin.

If this is so, it is clear that the social responsibilities of the man of letters cannot be identified with his duty as a citizen or subordinated to the interests of the State of which he is a member. He is bound to think of the interests of culture as a whole and to direct his activities in whatever direction he can serve them best. This does not mean that literature must be denationalized or cosmopolitan ; for the nationalism of a literature is a different thing from political nationalism. Indeed the periods when a literature gives fullest expression to the national spirit and tradition are those in which its international influence is greatest.

At the present time it seems to me of the first importance that literature should recognize that it has national and international responsibilities quite distinct from those of politics. There is an obvious political conflict between the Western powers and the states of the Axis, but there is no such conflict between their literatures. French and Italian literature are not Democratic and Fascist literature, they are just French and Italian literature, and though the political conflict will normally find some literary expression it will not involve any fundamental opposition between the two. In fact while the political systems are mutually exclusive, the literatures both belong to a common tradition of culture which transcends politics and, to some extent, even nationality.

But this ancient European tradition is threatened to-day by a new barbarism more formidable than anything in the past, since it possesses an infinitely stronger technical and scientific equipment. I am not referring to any particular political state or régime, but to the general tendency to social mechanization which treats science, literature and culture as nothing more than instruments in the struggle for power. The claim of politics to organize the State as a mass community is fatal to the old ideals of culture. If it

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could be completely realized, it would mean the end of thought and the end of history. Human society might thus attain a higher degree of unity than it has ever possessed in the past, but it would be a soulless unity, like that of the societies of the insect world. In such a society there would be no room for criticism or personality or any free spiritual activity and without these things it is difficult to see how literature could continue to exist.

GEORGE EVERY, S.S.M.

Critical Judgment in Politics.

The majority of our people still engage in political decision only at a general or at a municipal election. They are then required to decide which of two or more individuals is the most fit and proper person to sit in Parliament or upon the town council, to deliberate and to give a vote upon national or local affairs. But the historical circumstances of the last fifty or a hundred years, the decline of local life in parish, ward and borough, and the growth of what we are accustomed to call mass-civilization, have in practice changed the decision from a decision between individuals to a decision between parties, and made the House of Commons more and more a piece of political machinery to register decisions which are in fact made outside its walls. The chief decisions may indeed be made by members of Parliament, but as Conservative or Labour leaders.

At the same time there has been an increasing tendency to talk as if legislation was made not by Parliament but by the people. The fact that the House of Commons registers the comparative strength of two organizations which are spread all over the country reinforces this impression. The less the individual member is able to take up a political attitude himself, the more the individual citizen believes that he has at least as complete a political attitude as that of his M.P. The only political attitude is one of assent to a party programme. Even those who dissent from both parties often express their dissent by assent to a programme formulated by some private and confidential conference. And yet both the National Government and the Labour Party inspire widespread distrust. Neither possess the confidence which our system of general elections is supposed to secure to a Government.

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I believe that our system has been perverted out of its true shape by an increasing tendency to identify British constitutionalism with Continental and American Democracy. There is nothing wrong with the democratic element in our constitution as such. It is perfectly reasonable that a large number of people who are engaged for the most part of their lives in doing something practical which does not involve political judgments, should be asked at intervals whether they are convinced that a change of government is necessary, since the vagaries of government so directly affect them. Moreover the prospect of such a judgment can be a real check on the irresponsibility of statesmen. But the franchise was gradually enlarged to make the judgment of the people less sectional, less liable to be deflected by local and personal influences from the government upon the electorate, not to bring British institutions into conformity with the dogmas of universal suffrage, or even with the earlier Commonwealth doctrine ' that the people are, under God, the original of all just power.' The people do not originate political power, normally. They endure it, and sometimes they can endure it no longer but must overthrow it, and then the result claims to be their creation. It is not. The English Revolution was the creation of the great Whig families, though it won the victory because James II drove the squires and the country parsons beyond their patience. The French Revolution was the creation of the Paris bankers, though it came about because the peasants had lost their patience. The Russian Revolution was the creation of a few organizing geniuses, though it happened because the army would fight no longer and no one else was ready to take the reins.

Political judgments then are normally negative and critical. The people do not make positive political plans. They approve those which are made, or they refuse them by way of a revolution or the ballot box. The political plans are made by the politicians, who want to make other people feel that the plans are theirs, that the party programme belongs to all of them. But they can't.

It is part of the job of those who have been trained in literary criticism, history, philosophy or theology, to take the lead in exposing this situation, at least not to pretend that they sincerely believe in the efficacy of every single item on the party programme, when in fact all that they mean is that they prefer this set of politicians to that. But are their preferences of any more value

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than anyone else's? I think they are, if they have brought all the resources of their education to bear upon the issue that they can judge, and not wasted them in irrelevant efforts to arrive at another kind of judgment.

In so far as the politician appeals to argument, he generally appeals to-day to scientific argument, to a supposedly exact political science based on economics and supported by impressive statistics. This is because of the immense prestige of the positive sciences in our secondary schools and modern universities and through them in the elementary schools. Scientific language makes it all sound very well-informed. But there is another kind of politician who eschews it and plays upon a prejudice against science, created in many minds by the development of specialization and by the dogmatism and triviality of scientific specialists upon things they know nothing about. He proposes with some *éclat* to establish standards in realms of life which the scientific publicist and politician have left uncharted, where the ordinary young man and woman do require guidance. He will give them a religious politics and a political religion. Intelligent people are suspicious of both kinds of politician for some critical reasons. They suspect that the scientific sociological study of modern civilization leaves out factors which the science-trained mind regards as mere matters of taste and opinion. On the other hand they are still more suspicious of Lord Baldwin, with his pseudo-religious cult of moral re-armament, because he and his like are talking in a vague and imprecise way about things which can be discussed in a precise and objective way. They are spell-binding an uncritical public as the second-class novelist spell-binds them. It is not quite so obvious that the same kind of spell-binding can be done in pseudo-scientific terms by those who can use the vague prestige of the scientific expert in economics and psychology to produce an impression of objectivity. It is right that we should denounce Fascism as anti-rational, but we may not always prefer a politics which talks in rationalist terms. Anti-rationalism may walk in a pseudo-rationalistic dress.

It is the first task of the critic to attack the passivity which responds automatically to emotional stimulants in fields where there are no criteria in action, where the very existence of objective criteria is often held to be inconceivable. It is his second task to criticize those who try to apply the wrong criteria. And *Scrutiny*

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may have reached a stage where the second task is the more important. Those who are not anxious to be critical, objective and in a sense scientific in their judgment of political, moral and literary issues, are not very likely to read what we have to say. And this means that nearly all the readers of *Scrutiny* have a bias against the Government Party and on the whole in favour of the more intellectual approach of Left politicians, who are at least using argument. The question is 'what kind of argument?' If it is of the wrong kind, if the economics of the Left are only superficially scientific and evade the real issue of what economics is or can be about, then there may be a case for enduring the alternative Government until they have clarified their ideas somewhat.

This leads to a question which I have deliberately postponed. Can the critics influence the politicians as well as some of those who elect the politicians? I think this is a very difficult question. It was easier while the old two-party system obtained, when political life was still a social unity based on public school and university education, and the statesmen read Homer and *Culture and Anarchy*. But now in the eyes of the rising politicians the intellectuals are simply experts, and experts in subjects far more limited and specialized and literary than the art of ruling men. Scientists are useful because they may devise means here and there to get this or that plan of offence or defence or re-organization to work more cheaply and efficiently. Clergymen are useful if they will use their influence with the middle classes in support of this or that plan hatched in political quarters. But artists are only useful as advertisers or propagandists, and there is no place for the philosopher or the literary critic or the critical theologian in party politics.

Then are these people to give up trying to influence politics, and instead to help the numerous other non-politicians to make their occasional political judgments with some critical insight into the nature of the rival programmes, and a remembrance that the choice is between two evils? That seems to me unnecessarily defeatist. There is a real chance that sooner or later quite a large number of scientists, economists, psychologists and even politicians will come up against imponderables in their own field which they cannot understand without assistance from outside it. The element

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of pseudo-religion in their outlook and in that of their opponents will become more obvious to themselves and to their disciples. We need a critique of this, which psychology cannot by itself provide. I do not think that literary criticism can do all that is wanted, but I do believe that the part of a politician's message on which literary criticism can best be exercised is not his specific proposals, or even the rhetoric which he uses to put them across to various audiences, but the total response to a whole situation implied in his political outlook. This cannot be extracted out of current political literature without the assistance of detailed literary criticism, but the critic could help the philosopher and the theologian to assess, not only the more obvious weaknesses of political rhetoric, but the kind of response to life implied in recent Marxist literature and in some movements for the defence of democratic liberty and international law which look rational enough in the abstract. To do this diagnosis he need only be a critic. He need not be an authority on the economics of nationalization.

If we tried to save people from the wrong kind of political myth, and not only from the wrong kind of poetry and fiction, I believe that it would become more obvious than it is that there is a right and healthy kind of total response to the whole concrete situation of the individual in politics. The intellectual is always inclined to expect too much from political action, but the remedy for his fever is not inaction, but a critical concern first of all with the issues he does know, education, public libraries, town planning, for instance. In that he can learn to apply his sensibility to social issues without blunting it with bogus enthusiasms, until he sees what can be done in the present spiritual situation of the world, and what can't be done without a more radical change which a political revolution might prepare, but could not achieve. It is a commonplace that the system is wrong, but the system is rooted in an attitude, and any radical criticism of the system must lead sooner or later to a criticism of the attitude which underlies the structure of modern civilization. If that is a perversion of Christianity, as I believe it is, then sooner or later we must either scrap Christianity or make a deliberate effort to decontaminate it. But the task of detailed diagnosis is not yet complete, and there we still need more scrutiny.

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MICHAEL OAKESHOTT

So many good people nowadays take an interest in politics and even arrive at some kind of political action that the view that it is the duty of everyone to do something of the sort has become almost a commonplace, and not to recognize the claim of politics is taken to indicate some defect of character or sensibility. Nevertheless, this alleged obligation of everyone to take part in immediate political activity is, I believe, a gross delusion ; at best it is based upon a perverted social sense, at worst upon a false scale of values. I leave on one side such quasi-political activity as the exercise of the vote and the informal discussion of political questions. Most intelligent people will wish to be informed about what is happening in the world of politics and may perhaps wish to cast a vote. The more difficult question is the alleged obligation of everyone to take some more extended and more active part in politics.

Now, I take it that political action could reasonably be considered a universal duty if either of two conditions were satisfied. If political activity were the only adequate expression of a sensibility for the communal interests of a society or of mankind, or if it were incomparably the most important and most effective expression of such a sensibility—in either of these cases it might fairly be held that a universal duty exists to take part in it. Let us consider what truth there may be in either of these views about the nature of political action.

For any sensitive and educated person to feel that he takes little or no part in the promotion of the collective interests of his society or of mankind may provoke in him a sense of having failed to perform one of his duties. And the belief that those who take part in the direction or administration of the social or political system have the monopoly of what is called social service, that public activity is the sole genuine and adequate expression of public spirit, leads such a person to suppose that his whole duty remains unfulfilled unless, besides going about what he thinks of as his business, he takes an active part in the public affairs of his society. In the less sensitive the same neglect coupled with the same belief leads to the less creditable feeling of being outside the main stream of the life of their time. But it is a false belief, disastrous at once to the life of a society and to the conduct of its affairs. Just as

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the similar belief that the true, unhindered service of God was possible only to members of a religious order or officials of the Church (that is, to those who made a profession of it) promoted a false and irreligious division between those who were called to serve God and those who were not, and gave a false importance to the former, so this belief about social service promotes the erroneous view that some activity is disconnected from the communal life of a society and gives a false importance to the activity of those who engage in public life. Our sense of the unity of social life degenerates ; and by elevating unnaturally one form of communal activity, other forms, no less communal, are unnaturally depressed. But the truth is that nothing we do is unconnected with the life of our society, no activity is private in the sense of being without its place or context in the corporate social life, and no man who feels it his duty to take a part in the promotion of the communal interests of his society need consider himself to have failed merely because he has not entered the world of politics. The activity of a music-hall artist is no less certainly connected with the common life of his society than that of a Prime Minister or functionary, personal relationships are not less communal than public and legal relationships, and a sense of public duty which is satisfied only by some form of public activity is a sense which rests upon and helps to perpetuate an illusory division in the life of a society. Our choice, then, lies not between a life exclusively devoted to merely private interests and one connected with the communal life of our society, but between a life which has its place either here or there in the common life, a life which touches the life and interests of our society either in this way or in that.

But the defence of this alleged obligation of everyone to take part in immediate political action may be conducted on different lines. Instead of asserting that such action is a universal duty because it is the only genuine and adequate expression of a public spirit, it is suggested that the kind of communal activity we call political is of superior importance to any other kind, that it is incontestably the most effective expression of a sensibility for the common interests of a society. But there is, I believe, little or no truth in this suggestion. Politics is a highly specialized and abstracted form of communal activity; it is conducted on the surface of the life of a society and except on rare occasions makes remark-

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ably small impression below that surface. If politics were the continuous consideration and reconsideration of the life and order of a society from the bottom upwards, and if political activity involved the continuous recreation of the communal life, then, no doubt, for good or for ill, it would be highly important ; but it is not. A political system is primarily for the protection and occasional modification of a recognized legal and social order. It is not self-explanatory ; its end and meaning lie beyond itself in the social whole to which it belongs, a social whole already determined by law and custom and tradition, none of which is the creation of political activity. Political activity may have given us Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights, but it did not give us the contents of these documents, which came from a stratum of social thought far too deep to be influenced by the actions of politicians. A political system presupposes a civilization ; it has a function to perform in regard to that civilization, but it is a function mainly of protection and to a minor degree of merely mechanical interpretation and expression. The things political activity can achieve are often valuable, but I do not believe that they are ever the most valuable things in the communal life of a society. A limitation of view, which appears so clear and practical, but which amounts to little more than a mental fog, is inseparable from political activity. A mind fixed and callous to all subtle distinctions, emotional and intellectual habits become bogus from repetition and lack of examination, unreal loyalties, delusive aims, false significances are what political action involves. And this is so, not because the politically active are under the necessity of persuading the mentally obtuse before their activity can succeed ; the spiritual callousness involved in political action belongs to its character, and follows from the nature of what can be achieved politically. Political action involves mental vulgarity, not merely because it entails the concurrence and support of those who are mentally vulgar, but because of the false simplification of human life implied in even the best of its purposes. There are some, no doubt, who feel the need for the ' illusion of affairs,' and to these the superior importance of political activity, even in normal circumstances, will appear beyond question. But it is little more than a personal and psychological importance, and cannot be made the basis of a universal duty. In normal times, then, the superior importance of political activity over all other

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expressions of sensibility for the communal interests of a society, cannot, I think, be maintained. But at times of political crisis, when a society seems to be in danger of destruction, and when the work of protection appears to be more important than anything else, there is a special temptation to believe in the overwhelmingly superior importance of political activity. Nevertheless, this also is a temptation to be avoided. The work of protection is never of primary importance ; and when, in times of political crisis, it appears to be so, that is merely because, in the absence or poverty of creative activity, protection has usurped the place of recreation. On occasion a society may be preserved and may survive by means of political action, but to make it live requires a social activity of a different and more radical character ; and its life is as often threatened by political success as by political failure.

Political activity as I understand it, then, is neither the only adequate expression, nor the overwhelmingly most important expression of a sensibility for the communal interests of a society or of mankind. And consequently I do not think that there is a duty for everyone to take part in it. And if it is found that there is a necessary service to society which can be performed only on the condition of an abstention from political activity, then it may be said that those who are capable of performing such a service have a duty not to engage in politics. Nothing I have said should be taken to mean that I think political action is a wholly valueless expression of a sensibility for the communal interests of a society ; in my view it is a legitimate expression, and one which it is impossible for a society to go without. It is probably true that any man who can be strongly tempted to give himself up to political activity belongs to the world of politics, and he will not go wrong if he follows his genius. He will use his intelligence to reflect on questions of political importance ; as a writer he will become a publicist. In action, if he is prudent and lucky, he may be successful. He will retain his fundamental views and opinions almost unchanged, being without time or inclination to examine them afresh ; and he may take on the appearance of a leader. But in every society there are, I believe, some for whom political activity would be a perversion of their genius, a disloyalty to themselves, not because they have little or no part in the promotion of the communal interests of their society, but because their part is one

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which it is essential that a society shall have performed and which it is difficult if not impossible to combine with political activity. And among them, I believe, are those whose genius and interest lies in literature, in art and in philosophy.

The grounds on which I distinguish this section of society from all others in respect of political activity are clear to me. Their business is with the values which are the real life and character of a society. They are not (what they are sometimes called) the guardians of the values of society. Every society has its values, but if they are *guarded* at all, it is the politically active who do it. A society requires not only that its civilization should be guarded, but that it should be recreated. And the genius of the poet and the artist and to a lesser extent of the philosopher is to create and recreate the values of their society. In them a society becomes conscious and critical of itself, of its whole self ; just as, in the politically active, it becomes conscious of its political self. The last corruption that can visit a society is a corruption of its consciousness, and from this the politically active cannot protect it. If a society is to be saved from a corrupt consciousness it will be saved not by having its values and its civilization protected, but by knowing itself and having its values recreated. Indeed, political activity involves a corruption of consciousness from which a society has continuously to be saved. To ask the poet and the artist to provide a programme for political or other social action, or an incentive or an inspiration for such action, is to require them to be false to their own genius and to deprive society of a necessary service. What they provide is action itself, but in another and deeper sphere of consciousness. It is not their business to suggest a political remedy for political defects, but to provide an actual remedy for more fundamental defects by making a society conscious of its own character. The emotional and intellectual integrity and insight for which they stand is something foreign to the political world, foreign not merely in fact, but in essence. This integrity and insight cannot be introduced into that world without changing their character ; and to attempt to introduce them makes a chaos of what is otherwise a restricted but nevertheless ordered view. It is not their business to come out of a retreat, bringing with them some superior wisdom, and enter the world of political activity, but to stay where they are, remain true to their genius, which is

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to mitigate a little their society's ignorance of itself. This is the truth of the neglected half-truth that the artist and the poet and the philosopher are and should remain separated from ' the world ' ; not because they have no part in the promotion of the communal interests of mankind, but because to be free from the world is the condition of their contribution. Societies, in fact, are led from behind, and for those capable of leadership to give themselves up to political activity is to break away from their true genius. And a society in which this becomes common will, in a short while, be a society without leaders, a society ignorant of itself and without the power of recreating itself. And this is true not less in times of political crisis than in others. Culture, it is true, is indebted most to the politically weakened periods of history ; but in a society which circumstances encourage to embrace an exclusively political view, it has still its part and its friends their duty.

OLAF STAPLEDON

Writers and Politics.

There are two extreme views about the proper attitude of writers to politics ; and in this matter what is true of writers is true also, with appropriate qualifications, of all whose interest and ability lead to any kind of cultural activity. It is often said that such people should ignore politics, since their business is to maintain the life of the mind, and political passions are destructive of precise thinking and refined feeling. On the other hand it is often said that to-day the ' cultural people ' ought to devote all their energy to saving civilization from the disaster which so obviously threatens it, and that this is to be done only by political action.

I agree that civilization, and therefore culture, are in very grave danger, and that in such circumstances all who recognize the danger ought to do everything in their power to overcome it. But in my view the cultural people, and particularly the writers, have a very special and urgent function in the common task of saving civilization. Unless this function is fulfilled, the work of politicians cannot succeed. The cultural people alone, and only if they can thoroughly wake up to the special character of our age, can maintain and strengthen the civilized spirit. This does not mean that they are necessarily the most civilized among us, but

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simply that it is their office to develop and propagate the ideas and feelings which are essential to civilization. In our day they cannot effectively do this in the 'ivory tower.' Though they must constantly seek inspiration from the great expressions of the developed mind in the past and in the contemporary world, and must maintain an inner detachment from political strife, they must also, in my view, keep themselves sensitive to current affairs, and play a part in our common struggle.

To defend this position I must give a summary analysis of the main issue of our age. To-day the human race is passing through one of its major crises, if not the greatest crisis of all. Science gave it the possibility of transforming its circumstances so as to found a world-society in which every individual should have the means for a full and free life, and in which the main goal of social policy should be the development of individual capacity and the enrichment of the culture of the race, through world-wide community. This opportunity was missed. The Marxian explanation seems to me correct, so far as it goes. Through uncontrolled economic individualism, the vigorous bourgeois class was able to prostitute science and mechanism for personal, or at best for class, ends. To-day the same class holds power ; but its present members are very different from those who founded industrialism. Our commercial and financial oligarchy is on the whole effete, unimaginative, incapable of coping with the novel situations of the contemporary world. Because these people are nurtured in a strong but no longer appropriate tradition, they are mostly unable to recognize that the social order which they support is no longer able to fulfil social needs. In particular it cannot release the great new productive powers which should be benefiting all mankind. Thus the bourgeois oligarchy inevitably resists the natural growth of modern society. Increasingly it is forced by the logic of its position and its mentality, to destroy individual initiative and responsibility, to suppress truth and propagate lies. In fact it has to adopt policies lethal to true civilization. Further, since it is forced into imperialistic rivalries, it has increasingly to direct the energies of men toward war, and to discipline them for the defence of the bourgeois state. As I see it, there is no hope for civilization till the economic oligarchy is abolished.

If this were the whole truth of the matter, I should urge all

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who are concerned for culture to drop everything and work for the revolution, or for a united front against Fascism, which, at least in one aspect, is the extreme expression of the anti-social tendency of modern capitalism. We must neglect culture, I should say, until we have saved civilization, which is the only ground in which culture can thrive.

But the Marxian account of our troubles, though true so far as it goes, is not the whole truth. To defend civilization we must do more than attack its enemies. We must re-affirm and clarify the civilized spirit, which is simply the developed human spirit. For consider Fascism. Though it is indeed partly the product of Capitalism, there is more to it than this. Capitalism attempted to use the Fascist and Nazi movements for its own ends, but it has been captured by them. How has this happened? As I see it, Fascism, as a disposition in men's minds, is partly a blind and negative protest against a civilization which has proved itself insincere, which has preached liberal idealism and Christian brotherhood, but has practised gross materialism and economic exploitation. This protest has gone so far that it has spurned not only the vices of a particular civilization but the essential values of *true* civilization, in fact the values which are distinctively human, and which civilization alone can fully realize. These values I take to be, in the old language, reason and love ; or the free use of intelligence, and the mutual responsibility of self-conscious and other-conscious individuals. Instead of these, Fascism pathetically exalts the blind sociality of the gregarious animal, along with ruthless might, superstition and the cult of the tribe.

The rise of Fascism has given us a grim object-lesson to show that the essential values *are* essential. It is teaching us to purge our minds of false ideas about civilization, such as that it is the equipment of the archaic tribe with modern weapons, or that it is *merely* the resultant of economic forces. Fascism is teaching us to form a clear and passionate conviction as to what the truly civilized, the developed way of behaving really is. Unless we do this, the attempt to resist Fascism will merely breed Fascism in ourselves.

If the cultural people are to fulfil their task of propagating the civilized kind of experience and behaviour, they must be prepared to go about their business in such a way as to take effect. Neither the civilized spirit nor culture can in our day be maintained,

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developed or propagated by intellectuals who live in a world of their own, taking in one another's washing. Those who would make a stand for civilization to-day must lay themselves fully open to the fertilizing influence of the contemporary world, with its prodigious troubles and its new hope. On the other hand the cultural people must not, as such, try to be politicians or political propagandists. They lack the special knowledge and skill. Propaganda seeks simply to spread information, rouse the will for political action, and organize. Some writers may sometimes take part in sheer propaganda, but this is not the writer's special function. His task is to absorb experience and express it as it appears to the civilized mind. To-day the outstanding object of experience is the contemporary world-crisis. If he would fulfil his function he must assimilate aspects of this, so that he may present the civilized reaction to it, either by direct commentary or by creating imaginative symbols of it.

The political people make a huge mistake when they affirm that this kind of thing is not urgent, and should be postponed till Fascism has been defeated. For Fascism is infectious. As the prolonged crisis develops, many of those who are concerned for civilization tend increasingly, and in spite of their best intentions, to fall into a mood very like the Fascism which they oppose. Anxiety breeds a craving to insist on rigid discipline, to suppress idiosyncrasies, to find scape-goats, to indulge in tribal passions. Thus arises a kind of inverted Fascism, or 'para-Fascism,' a yielding to the temptation to use in service of civilization methods essentially barbarous and destructive of civilization. Dictators can well afford to indulge in policies which tend to de-humanize their subjects by undermining their intellectual and moral integrity ; for it is to the interest of dictators that men should be stupid and insensitive. But the defenders of the distinctively human way of life must abjure such policies. They must appeal to civilized motives, not to tribal passions. Their propaganda must be humanizing, not brutalizing. They must never, for the sake of an easy temporary victory, indulge in methods which tend to destroy the precious germs of the civilized spirit. Some earnest political people naively suppose that, even if for the sake of political victory we have to neglect and violate the civilized spirit for a while, we shall easily restore it when the trouble is over. This is a tragic error. In

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betraying the spirit we betray the citadel, no matter how many superficial victories we win in the field. In this conflict we must not adopt the enemy's methods. As well might birds seek to conquer fishes by plunging under water with them and holding them till they drown.

Cultural people, of course, are of many sorts. Some are more, some less, in contact with social and political affairs. Some have more aptitude than others in this field. Some can serve best by criticizing contemporary culture, and particularly letters, so as to expose by concrete examples the ways in which it falls short of the truly civilized temper, and especially the respects in which it is vitiated by assumptions bred of class dominance. Very different is the part of those whose power is mainly 'creative,' a vague word which I must not here define. Their office, now as always, is to produce works of imagination which symbolize and epitomize aspects of man's struggle to adjust himself to his environment. In some periods, perhaps, this is best done in seclusion. There are moments in history when the vital issue is the problem of the individual's orientation, or the refinement of feeling, or the sharpening of the instruments of thought. Even to-day there may be exceptional writers or artists who are justified in exploring aspects of reality which must seem irrelevant to most of their contemporaries. These must judge for themselves whether they are pursuing will-o'-the-wisps or laying up treasure for a future generation. But surely in this crucial phase of man's career every creative writer who is tempted to choose the ivory tower should earnestly consider whether his work is likely to be so very valuable to the future that he is justified in denying the claims of the present. For it is at least possible that if these claims are neglected culture will have no future.

So far as the writers and readers of *Scrutiny* are concerned, each, I suppose, must discover for himself what he can do, taking into account his special equipment. In many cases, no doubt, the claims of profession or trade will inevitably use up most of a man's time and energy. But clearly those who are engaged in teaching can constantly exercise a civilizing influence, so long as they do their best to relate their teaching to the contemporary world. And all, whatever their work, should be able to stand for the civilized spirit in their personal intercourse, and sometimes on public platforms or in the press.

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For *Scrutiny* itself there may be a great future if it boldly fulfils the office of scrutinizing not only current literary work but also current affairs, always, of course, from the point of view not of party politics but of the civilized intelligence. In particular it should set itself to expose cases of insincere or muddled argument and illicit emotional appeal in all kinds of public expression. It should from time to time criticize the programmes and the activities of all the political parties, not from the technical political point of view, but in respect of their unspoken assumptions and political philosophy. It should be not only critical but constructive. It should seek not only to defend but to develop the civilized spirit in relation to the changing conditions and changing aspirations of our world. Thus it might come to play a crucial part in the revival and transformation of the ideals of Western civilization.

L. SUSAN STEBBING

Philosophers and Politics.

It is an old saying of Plato's that philosophers should be kings ; then only will the troubles of the polis, or state, cease. Plato conceived kings primarily as educators rather than as legislators, whilst executive problems seem to have worried him not at all. The immense differences between an Ancient Greek city-state and a modern ' Great Power,' the serious defects in Plato's ' constructed state,' and the radical divergence of his conception of democracy from ours need not here concern us. I am not among those who hold that Plato was the first Fascist, although I should find his ideal city an intolerable habitation. It is, however, still worth while to ask whether Plato was correct in assuming that philosophers have any claims to be regarded as peculiarly fitted to intervene in political affairs, or, alternatively, whether the claims of politics are especially stringent in the case of philosophers and, if so, how they can meet those claims.

At the outset it is desirable to clear away a misconception sometimes entertained by those who might be expected to know better. ' Whom, Socrates, do you take to be the genuine philosophers?' The young man's query was pertinent. The proposed connexion of philosophers and politics seemed as absurd to the Greek of the fifth century, B.C., as to the Englishman of to-day.

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Socrates' reply was in effect that a philosopher is 'a spectator of all time and of all existence.' We may modify this grandiloquence by adopting the phrase of another great writer: a philosopher is one 'who sees life steadily and sees it whole.' Even this is too magnificent and, no doubt, meaningless. Nevertheless, it is necessary to bear in mind what Plato meant by a genuine philosopher before we accept or reject his contention that all would be well with a State where the education of the young was controlled by philosophers carefully trained from birth to fulfil that high function. It is not rash to assert that, judged by Plato's criterion, none of us are genuine philosophers. This platitude might not seem worth enunciating. Yet, when twenty years or so ago, the British Institute of Philosophy was founded, an enthusiastic leader-writer in the *Manchester Guardian* entitled his leader 'Philosophers as Kings,' pointing joyfully to the fact that the imposing list of members of the Council included two ex-Prime Ministers as well as the Prime Minister himself. Unfortunately, of these three gentlemen two had no claims, one hardly any claim, to be regarded as a philosopher even when judged by our low standards. The anonymous founder of that Institute himself believed that the political and social troubles of our times could be remedied if only philosophers would take the lead. He thought that their refusal or their inability to do so was simply the outcome of their too great attachment to academic questions. It is, I think, germane to the topic of this symposium for me to give a brief indication of his hopes and to point out the illusions upon which, in my opinion, those hopes were based. I regret that I must refer to him by the anonymous pronoun 'he.'

There were troubles in China; it was sometime before the Manchukuo 'incident.' He felt that the Institute's *Journal* should publish articles 'dealing with the troubles in China' and pointing out 'how they could most satisfactorily be remedied.' So strongly did he feel that this was a work for philosophers to do that he even urged me to write such an article, ignoring the fact that I had never been to China, that I was wholly ignorant of what was happening there and of what events had led up to the troubled situation, and knew nothing of the chief personalities involved. I remember well the urgency of his pleading: 'You *could* if you would; you have been trained in philosophy; you must know

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how these troubles could be dealt with philosophically.' Having come late in life to the study of metaphysics, he had conceived a great admiration for large speculations, especially those that were ' idealistic '—in all three senses of that much used word. His faith would have been grotesque had it not been pathetic in its religious earnestness and practical futility. At a Council Meeting at the end of the Institute's third year he complained bitterly to the ' academic members of the Council,' *i.e.*, to those of us who earned our livings by teaching philosophy—which cannot be taught—that we were not doing our duty. After three years, so he felt, the work of the Institute of Philosophy ought to have made an appreciable difference in the public outlook. He was a successful business man and knew, so he told us, how to put a newly-manufactured gadget on the market. He was willing to devise the methods of publicity and bear the expenses incurred in putting across our philosophical wares to the public, but we were regrettably slow in producing those wares.

I assume that no one who reads this article would share the illusions of the public-spirited founder of the British Institute of Philosophy. But the writer of the leader in the *Manchester Guardian*, to whom I have referred, was himself an academic philosopher of some repute and of considerable political experience ; he too had been cheered by the inclusion of some Cabinet Ministers and other political notabilities among the members of a philosophical society. Is there any foundation for such hopes as these men had? If not, how are we to answer the questions which, at the beginning of my contribution to this symposium, I suggested were still worth considering?

To me at least it seems clear that no one philosopher, nor any collection of philosophers, has as such any claim to intervene directly in public affairs. By ' as such,' I mean, ' in virtue of his being a philosopher.' In these days it is not necessary to emphasize the complexity of public affairs and the crying need for expert knowledge—experts not of one kind only but of many kinds. Equally is it unnecessary to add yet one more diagnosis of the maladies of our civilization. It is enough to point out that philosophy is not a body of doctrines to be instilled, willy nilly, into the minds of those who ' control the destinies of Europe '—to adopt the language of our more cultured newspapers. We must distinguish between *intervening directly* and *having some slight*

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influence that may, should circumstances be propitious, *affect to some appreciable degree long-distance policy*. The expression is clumsy but the facts do not permit of neat phrasing. One thing is certain—' whatever fool or blackguard made the world,' it was not a logician or a philosopher with a taste for pigeon-hole phrases. I shall, then, be content to assume that the utmost that can be expected from a philosopher is that, as an outcome of his life's activities, there should be some slight increase in the factors making for tolerable living. His ' life's activities ' is the phrase to be noted ; I do not refer to the philosopher's professional work, still less to his metaphysical system, should he happen to be so misguided as to produce one. A man's philosophy should (and, if he is properly to be called a ' philosopher ' must) inform his life. If it is the business of a philosopher to seek to clarify thought, to find reasons for his beliefs, to be restless and dissatisfied so long as he cannot answer questions which others believe they have answered only because they asked the question confusedly, then he must develop in himself habits of critical and careful thinking that he could hardly discard when he leaves the solitude of his own study. Just exactly that is, in my opinion, the business of the philosopher: critical questioning combined with the resolute conviction that hard intellectual effort can resolve the questions it is worth while to ask.

There should be a row of asterisks here in order to indicate a serious gap which the allotted space does not permit me to fill as I should wish. I descend rapidly to details. A philosopher least of all men should deal in abstractions and generalities. Let us recognize then, that a contemporary English philosopher is a citizen of this country ; he has to perform the ordinary duties that can be exacted from him. He ought to perform the duty laid upon him as a citizen of a democracy, namely, the duty of contributing his instructed and informed opinion . . . A difficulty arises in attempting to complete the sentence. *To whom*, and *how*, is his opinion to be contributed? The answer, I believe, depends in part upon what sort of person the philosopher is. His minimum contribution will consist in giving his vote, voicing his opinion in the company of those with whom he discusses political affairs, and vigorously reforming his opinion should new and relevant factors in the situation demand it. Not all philosophers would, I think, be fitted to take a larger part in political affairs, in the ordinary

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meaning attached to ' political affairs.' Philosophers as such are not (again, in my opinion) specially qualified for political action or political thinking. Those who are not may, however, still be doing good service for their country and, thus, for mankind.

A philosopher with my outlook demands examples, lest we become lost amidst verbiage—too often mistaken for profound speculations, seeing that obscurity seems profound to those who have assumed enlightenment. An example is to hand. ' The Nazi philosophy,'—' the philosophy of Fascism '—these are now phrases in current use. I believe that the phrases are not ill-chosen. The collection of dogmas, aspirations, and ideals that seem to inspire the leaders of Germany, including *der Fuehrer* himself, do constitute what is roughly described as ' a philosophy of life.' What this amounts to is perhaps sufficiently well known for me to be able to be brief. I call attention to some points only. This philosophy includes certain beliefs about human beings generally and the Germans in particular, certain beliefs concerning the relative unimportance of individual citizens alive to-day as contrasted with the importance of their possible descendants. The acceptance of this philosophy is in large part due to the historical development of the German people. The German people are *as a people* politically young ; their political philosophy is philosophically immature. Those of us who have not the misfortune to be Germans can view this philosophy with some measure of detachment and thus recognize its immaturity and see the reasons for the hold it has upon its adherents in Germany. We can see too that direct attack upon this philosophy by denouncing those who teach it or by trying the arts of propaganda upon those who hold it is useless. To pursue this topic would, however, be to go beyond my present theme, for which the Nazi philosophy is but an example, chosen not chiefly because of its urgency but because of our familiarity with it. Anyone who will admit that there is a Nazi philosophy and that *its* influence has an effect upon our lives, through the international situation, must surely recognize the futile untruth of Hegel's famous dictum—' philosophy bakes no bread '. We, in this country, live differently from the way we should be living had, for example, Locke, Rousseau, Bentham and Hegel, not thought as they did. At long-distance how philosophers think matters to (*i.e.*, makes a difference to) the lives of ordinary citizens.

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I happen to hold the view that the Nazi philosophy is wholly mistaken. Brevity compels me to be dogmatic. Its positive dogmas have been largely disproved ; its moral ideas belong to an outworn age ; its denial of the value of intellect is self-destructive. The foregoing statements show sufficiently, I hope, an urgent task that confronts philosophers (of a certain sort) in this country now. For example, the phrase ' outworn age ' needs to be examined and justified, or refuted. Naturally I believe that it is justified. The moral ideas of Nazi philosophy need to be stated clearly and examined dispassionately. The positive dogmas must be shown to be dogmas, *i.e.*, unwarrantable assumptions held with the conviction of religious enthusiasts.

There would seem to be two ways of ' justifying ' that, and ' showing ' this. The first would be by piecemeal examination of the philosophy in question. I do not deny that to a qualified set of people and at a moment of great urgency this method might be properly used and with some degree of success. But the success would be a short-term success necessitated by the urgency of a short-term problem. The other way would be by so training citizens as to make them able to criticize not only rival ' philosophies of life ' but also their own ; in short, by helping them to think philosophically. This method requires time and freedom from pressing anxieties.

Reflection upon this point leads me back to the second of the two questions suggested in my first paragraph. Are the claims of politics specially stringent upon philosophers? I hope it is clear from what I have already said that this question does not admit of a simple answer. For, the question seems simple but is not so. I have space here only to break it into two distinct questions. (1) Can philosophers as such make valuable contributions towards the direction of public affairs at a moment of political stress? I believe that the answer is that they cannot. (2) Do the activities of philosophers stand in a closer relation to public affairs than, for example, the activities of a Sanscrit scholar, or of a pure mathematician? To this question the answer, I believe, is yes. Renan once said that the ambiguity of the words ' nation ' and ' nationality ' might well plunge the world in disaster. Perhaps he was meditating on the activities of Bismarck ; however that may be, the present state of Europe adds a footnote to his comment.

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We should now add: 'And the word "race."' I should wish to make a further observation. Much of the effect which we refer to as 'mass-behaviour' is due to facile thinking in terms of abstractions. I do not deny that it is convenient to *say* 'Germany insists,' 'England expects,' and so on, but it is dangerous to *think* that England, or Germany, 'insist' or 'expect' as *I*, or *you*, could 'insist' or 'expect.' Not Germany, but *Germans*; then it is sense to ask, 'Which set of Germans?' A philosopher is more likely to avoid the fallacy of thinking in abstractions than are those untrained in philosophical thinking. This is true of 'the philosopher,' that is, of a human being in so far as he is thinking as a philosopher. But 'the philosopher' is also an abstraction about which we must speak with caution.

If it is correct to maintain that how philosophers have thought in the past affects our lives to-day, then, so it seems to me, we cannot desire that philosophers should cease, even at a time of political stress, to devote much of their time and their energy to thinking as philosophers. To-day will also become a past; it matters to those who will live in what is our future that some of our best minds should be now attempting to clarify the principles in accordance with which men's lives could be lived satisfyingly. This adverb is ugly but the past participle or the adjective 'satisfied' would not do. (To suppose that it would do was one of Plato's gravest mistakes). When, if ever, our privately dreamed of Utopia comes into existence life has still to be lived, and in some ways to be lived just as it is now at its sanest and best moments of enjoyment and understanding. It is to this end that political strife, perhaps even war, must be endured. But strife and war do not cease suddenly, coming to an end as a bridge that is exploded leaving a gap that can be bridged again with materials brought from some safe place. Throughout the time of strife philosophical thinking must go on. It will be fortunate if there are a few who are able, at least for comparatively brief periods, to think unattached to their present miseries. Certainly those brief periods would be moments of enjoyment; there is no sin in that, no callous disregard of suffering.

Only a philosopher who takes philosophy, but not himself, seriously, would agree with the above statements. I do not think that a philosophy can be constructed *ad hoc*, although a fashion-

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able nostrum may be. Accordingly, I do not believe that a philosopher can properly try to link up his philosophical interests with his political views nor lay down principles for the explicit guidance of politicians. But I believe that his political views will be in part determined by his philosophical outlook ; to the extent to which his philosophy influences other people their political views will also be in part affected. Any form of political society which lays restrictions upon free discussion, which sets up prohibitions and attempts to induce its members to think alike is incompatible with the activities of a philosopher. A philosopher who has the misfortune to be entrapped in such a society has no alternative but to die. In such a society it would not be worth while for any human being to remain alive.

R. H. TAWNEY

It is asked whether *Scrutiny*, while remaining predominantly a literary journal, should give part of its space to political articles. The argument that the luxury of letters must be postponed in an emergency to the practical necessities of reconstructing society and organizing peace does not seem to me to hold water. There are moments, no doubt, when it is necessary to fill gaps in a thin line by throwing in the cooks and the orderly-room staffs ; but, whatever may be wrong with politics to-day, it is not a shortage of pen-power devoted to discoursing on them.

Au-dessus de la mêlée was a phrase which caused fury, when first coined ; but who can doubt now that we should have done better, while getting on with a necessary and disgusting job, to think twice before dismissing Rolland's words as an outrage? Crisis or no crisis, the world will go on. At a time when most of us find it difficult to keep our heads, it is not less important, but more important, that the permanent values of civilization should be brought to our attention. The question is whether a journal primarily concerned with those values has, in virtue of its concern with them, any special contribution to make to political sanity. If it has, let it make it. If it has not, it had better resist the temptation to darken the atmosphere and add to the din by joining the ranks of the blowers off of steam.

The answer to that question depends, it seems to me, partly

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on the meaning given the word 'Politics,' partly on the manner in which it is intended that politics should be treated. There is no reason why a writer whose business is letters should not also speak with authority on some aspect of public affairs. In so far, however, as his knowledge of the latter is an individual *tour de force*—an addition to his principal activity, not an extension of it—a literary journal does not seem a more appropriate place than another to be the vehicle of his views, since it is not his work on literature which has caused him to hold them.

The same statement is not true of the more general conclusions which a man may reach, not through raids into regions remote form his main interest, but as its natural development. In spite of the absurd fetiche-worship surrounding them, what are called 'Subjects' are not independent entities, poised each in majestic isolation on its private peak. If not merely, as has profanely been said, departments of knowledge on which it is practicable to set an examination paper that can be done in three hours, they have often only recently been disentangled from each other. The sciences, in particular, which are concerned with man—consider economics, political science, sociology, anthropology and the various species of history—owe their separate existence to considerations with which practical convenience has had more to do than the articulations of the universe. Their boundaries are fluid and provisional ; their frontiers intersect. The debateable land between them is not the least likely region for good sense to be concealed in.

It would be surprising, in such circumstances, if those engaged in one corner of the field had no conclusions to offer those working in another. It would be surprising—so it seems to a layman—if men whose chief concern is literature found nothing worth saying on the question of how to live sensibly together, without violence and cheating. There are, doubtless, many aspects of their work of which he knows nothing : but are these the most important? They learn, it is to be presumed, to know garbage by its smell, and sciolism when they see it. They acquire, one supposes, a habit of discriminating between the genuine article and merely saleable stuff. Since their job, or part of their job, is ideas, they are aware that those alluring wild-fowl are rarely what they seem, but sometimes more and often less, and develop, it may be suspected, a certain tact in stalking them. They can hardly fail

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to be impressed by the interaction between the practical arrangements of a society and the quality of its culture, or to be struck by the extreme deviousness of the channels through which the influence of each upon the other makes itself felt. Would they not be more or less than human if the aptitudes acquired and habits formed in the course of their work did not suggest some opinions as to the management of the world about them, and the plans advanced for improving it? If so, can it be argued that such opinions are not worth stating, or that a journal of literature strays outside its province if it gives them an opportunity of being stated in its pages?

Possibly it can. If, however, the opposite view be taken, to what conclusion does it lead?

Not, it seems to me, to the offer of *Scrutiny* as a platform for the exposition of yet another set of water-tight philosophies, or for the discussion of political strategy and tactics, or for the advocacy of particular schemes or revolution or reform—not, in short, to its use as an additional vehicle for propaganda or system-mongering. The air is thick with birds of that feather, and the world deaf with their squawking. Both the function of *Scrutiny* and the work most worth doing are of a different kind. The former is a matter for its Editorial Committee ; the latter, it appears to me, can be pretty simply stated.

The events crowded into the last twenty years have widened horizons, but they have also scattered wits. Their effect on political writing has been that standards of thought and discussion have temporarily gone to pieces. The collapse is most conspicuous among the intelligentsia, part of whose business, it might have been supposed, is to endeavour to maintain them. Specialists, no doubt, at least when addressing-fellow-specialists, are as scrupulous as they were ; but almost anything seems good enough to be offered to the public. Catch-words are palmed off on it as arguments ; deductions from uncriticized assumptions as the rigours of logic; mere appeals to the emotions, including the meanest, as political sagacity ; solemn absurdities as revelations. With consistency at a discount, and the truth of a case identified with its persuasiveness, nothing, it sometimes seems, is too fantastic to be believed, too dishonest to be proposed, or too atrocious to be contemplated. Anarchy is in the saddle, with clap-trap as its herald.

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If the picture appears overdrawn, let the sceptic reflect on contemporary discussions, by men of opposite convictions, not of doubtful subtleties, but of such large issues as democracy, the social system, and international affairs. The nation, it seemed, felt no great astonishment when its leading statesman, after a lifetime of orations on the first, calmly announced that he had decided to conceal from the public the chief plank in his policy, for fear that, if he divulged it, he might lose an election. It is possible for a writer, in discoursing of the second, to refer, with the solemnity of one announcing a discovery, to the part played in it by the fact of social class—as though a premise were a conclusion ; as though Marx had said the last word on the subject, instead of the first ; as though sociology had began in the forties of last century, and ended in the eighties. It is not only possible, but common, in connection with the third, for actions committed on one side of a frontier to be denounced as criminal by writers who applaud the same actions as virtuous when committed on the other. It is, doubtless, true that what makes the brew turbid is partly the mere mass of new ingredients tumbled into it, and that there are wholesome simples to be rescued from the rubbish. But, with every one stirring the pot, and no one skimming it, it is difficult to see how its contents are to become drinkable.

If such is the condition of political writing, what is needed, in order to improve it, is nothing abstruse or recondite. Its degeneration is partly due to causes of the same kind—competition for publicity, a large market for cheap wares, the belief that, provided that work sells, its quality does not matter—as have caused a similar degeneration in the case of literature. The cure, in so far as there is one, is much the same. It is not a new body of political doctrines, but a new rigour in dealing with all doctrines, whether new or old. It is to judge them by some standard more permanent and exacting than the fashions of the moment ; to distinguish between original and merely imitative work ; to be merciless to the superficial or pretentious, and call humbug by its right name ; to consider theories in relation to the realities of history and psychology ; to ask, if confronted by resounding generalizations as to the sanctity of property, 'property in what?'; to consider, when the problems of proletarian existence are under discussion, of whom precisely the proletariates of different countries are composed

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to-day. It is, in short, to assist authors and speakers to have a conscience in their work, by making them aware that they will meet informed criticism.

The effort to maintain standards by informed criticism, conveyed by pens sharper than a serpent's tooth, has been, I suppose, one of the notes of *Scrutiny*. An outsider cannot say if it is possible or expedient for it to attempt to do for political writing what it has done for literature, without—what would clearly be foolish—injuring its main work by assuming responsibilities which may over-load the boat. It would, in my opinion, be useful if it could.

LITERARY CRITICISM IN FRANCE (I)

I. Introductory.

'IT will be our criticism, perhaps, that will most fittingly last longest,' wrote M. Charles Maurras in a characteristic pronouncement. 'A Sainte-Beuve and a Renan will have a good chance of making posterity one day forget the Flauberts, the Leconte de Lisles and perhaps even the Hugos.'[1] Frenchmen are sometimes extremely modest about their poets, but they are seldom modest about their critics. They have long regarded themselves as the great critics of the modern world and until lately no one has ventured to challenge their supremacy.

There is of course a good deal of evidence to support the French claims. In France literature is, as it has long been, a *métier* and criticism is regarded as a part of the profession. It seldom occurs to a French critic to preface his first book with an essay explaining and justifying the function of criticism. He would scarcely think of describing his art as ' a charming parasite ' or as ' books about books.' When he does discuss the value of criticism it is usually because he is hard up for a subject for his weekly *chronique* or he does it casually in an aside. Thus Rémy de Gourmont concludes a discussion of the respective functions of novelist and critic by declaring categorically: ' They must both be creators of Values ' and leaves it at that.

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The Frenchman's confidence, which appears so attractive and reassuring when compared with the doubt and uncertainty which beset English critics, has undoubtedly influenced the output of criticism in France. We may have doubts about the greatness of French criticism, but we can have none about its bulk or its seriousness. No one who glances over the shelves of a big library can help being impressed by the number of volumes of criticism by men whose names are household words in Europe or who like Brunetière and Faguet were reputed to be great critics in their day, though we think very differently of them now.

Although the fame of French criticism rests mainly on the work of the distinguished writers of the last century, the origins of the French supremacy must be sought in an earlier age and it is interesting to compare passages from two representative seventeenth-century critics who were exactly contemporary—Sainte-Evremond and Dryden:

> ' Il est certain que personne n'a mieux entendu la nature que Corneille ; mais il l'a expliquée différemment, selon ses temps différents. Étant jeune, il en exprimait les mouvements ; étant vieux, il nous en découvre les ressorts. Autrefois il donnait tout au sentiment ; il donne plus aujourd'hui à la connaissance ; il ouvre le cœur avec tout son secret ; il le produisait avec tout son trouble . . . [2]

> Corneille a cru que ce n'était pas assez de les[3] faire agir ; il est allé au fond de leur âme chercher le principe de leurs actions ; il est descendu dans leur cœur pour y voir former les passions et y découvrir ce qu'il y a de plus caché dans leurs mouvements.'[4]

> ' If Shakespeare were stripped of all the bombasts in his passions, and dressed in the most vulgar words, we should find the beauties of his thoughts remaining ; if his embroideries were burnt down, there would still be silver in the melting pot. For what remains the excellency of that poet was, as I have said, in the manly passions ; Fletcher's in the softer: Shakespeare writ better between man and man: Fletcher, between man and woman: consequently the one described friendship better ; the other love ; yet Shakespeare taught Fletcher to write love ; and Juliet and Desdemona are originals . . . Shakespeare had an

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universal mind, which comprehended all characters and all passions . . . '[5]

It can be seen that the extracts from Sainte-Evremond are something that we recognize at once as *literary* criticism. The balance and maturity of his writing and the sureness with which he handles the language of criticism make Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare sound like an extract from a respectable essay by a sixth form boy. Dryden's thought is commonplace and, compared with Sainte-Evremond's, his sensibility seems crude.

With these passages in front of us, it can scarcely be denied that the critical intelligence reached maturity far sooner in France than in England. Sainte-Evremond's best work is the product of a society whose sensibility and powers of analysis were already highly developed. Nor must we overlook the work of another writer who was considered the greatest critic of his time. It is a little difficult to understand Boileau's contemporary reputation, but his judgments on French poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have almost all been endorsed by posterity. Although there is a danger of using single passages and isolated examples to prove too much, the fact that the seventeenth century had already made up its mind where the great French writers ' came ' points to the existence of an intellectual élite whose criticism had an immense influence on the work of the great writers of the period.

This does not mean that the seventeenth century possessed an abundance of good *written* criticism. The maturity of the French intelligence is more apparent in the moralists of the period than in its literary critics. Indeed, a society which produced the sort of philosophical and psychological analysis that we find in different ways in the *Traité des passions de l'âme*, in the *Caractères* of La Bruyère and the *Maximes* of La Rochefoucauld appears to have possessed in such a high degree the gifts which are necessary for good criticism that we may feel inclined to wonder why the bulk of the written criticism of the period was disappointing, why Boileau is crude in comparison to La Bruyère.

' The history of seventeenth-century society,' replies the historian, ' is a study of imperatives.'[6] It is true that the tendency of the century was to reduce poetry to ' the rules,' conduct to an intricate code and human life to a series of neat formulas ; and

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though this tendency was partly responsible for the discipline and economy of the great masters, its influence on lesser men was disastrous. It was the first stage in the conflict between natural good taste and subservience to a narrow dogmatism which runs through the whole of modern French criticism and which for all its boasted enlightenment dominates the nineteenth century when the dogmatism of Aristotle was exchanged for the dogmatism of the scientific philosophies.

It is significant that the French Academy began as a series of informal meetings between men who wished to discuss poetry ; but almost at once the State, in the person of Richelieu, stepped in and transformed that informal literary society into an official body. There is no doubt that the Academy corresponded to the needs of the age or that it was from the first a symbol of the natural desire of the Frenchman for an authority which would tell him whether he was ' right ' in admiring a particular author. The symbol was one thing, but the reality was quite another. Once an external authority has been set up it easily turns into the Leviathan which crushes and represses. In the seventeenth century in spite of the disastrous attack on the *Cid*, the intellectual élite succeeded to a great extend in holding the balance between tradition and experiment and curbed the dogmatism of the Academy ; but when the élite had disappeared, dogmatism carried all before it.

The greatness of French literature in the seventeenth century lies partly in the balance between intellect and the senses. The skill with which the intellect analyses emotion without the least distortion gives the literature of the seventeenth century its extraordinary order and clarity. In the next century this correspondence between intellect and senses disappears. On the one hand, we have the impression that the senses are lagging behind the intellect ; there is no growth of sensibility ; feelings become conventional and criticism is full of counters like ' sublime ' which do not correspond to any living reality. On the other hand, we get a literature of revolt against dogmatism which produces the undisciplined growth of feeling that we find in Rousseau.

It is, however, the dogmatic principle which is reflected in eighteenth-century criticism. Its intrinsic value is not great. Whatever his merits as a thinker, Vauvenargues' criticism is decidedly

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inferior to Sainte-Evremond's and it is clear from his chapter on Corneille and Racine that he had much less *direct* sensibility than his seventeenth-century predecessor. The interest of Voltaire and La Harpe is mainly historical ; and in spite of his revolutionary social theories, Voltaire appears in his literary criticism as a die-hard conservative. Diderot, it is true, belongs to a different order. Although the problems discussed in the *Paradoxe sur le comédien* no longer seem of immediate importance, the dialogue remains a masterpiece of dialectic and is still worth reading for the author's admirable handling of the language of criticism.

Voltaire and Diderot, however, were the men who marked the beginning of a new phase of French culture. In the eighteenth century the great gifts developed in the France of Louis XIV were turned against the civilization that produced them and were largely responsible for its ruin. The result was that at the beginning of the nineteenth century not only the intellectual élite, but also the sanctions behind seventeenth-century civilization had vanished. The great task of the nineteenth-century critics was therefore to find a philosophy on which to base their criticism, to find a justification not simply for criticism but for art. For though the desire for absolute authority remained, the philosophical basis of that authority seemed to the nineteenth century to have been swept away.

II. Taine.[7]

There is an interesting passage in Gourmont's paper on *L'idéalisme*[8] which deserves attention from anyone who wishes to understand nineteenth-century criticism in France :

> ' L'idéalisme signifie libre et personnel développement de l'individu intellectuel dans la série intellectuelle ; le Symbolisme pourra (et même devra) être considéré par nous comme le libre et personnel développement de l'individu esthétique dans la série esthétique ; et les symboles qu'il imaginera ou qu'il expliquera seront imaginés ou expliqués selon la conception spéciale du monde morphologiquement possible à chaque cerveau symbolisateur.'

The striking thing about this passage is that the critic formulates his standards in terms of a *technical* philosophy. Where Arnold proposes as a test of poetry its ' high seriousness ' or

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its value as ' a criticism of life.' Gourmont uses terms like ' *libre et personnel développement de l'individu intellectuel dans la série intellectuelle* ' and ' *monde morphologiquement possible à chaque cerveau symbolisateur.*' These differences are not fortuitous ; they are not disposed of by saying that Arnold was a product of Liberal Protestantism and Gourmont the product of nineteenth-century scepticism. They are, I think, almost entirely due to the fact that technical philosophy is still part of the normal curriculum in French secondary schools, whereas scarcely any Englishmen study the subject at all.

I make no excuse for underlining this point because the influence of philosophy on nineteenth-century criticism was decisive. French critics were looking for something to replace ' the rules ' and, had they but known it, the wisdom of the seventeenth century. It is hardly surprising that they selected one or other of the fashionable philosophical systems of the day. The confidence of the nineteenth century in science was unshakeable. Critics like Taine believed that they had at last found in the scientific philosophies a certain basis for literary judgment which would dispose of the vicissitudes of taste and the caprice of the individual, and the age was rich not only in philosophical, but also in critical systems.

Taine's distinction between ' system ' and ' method ' in criticism does not appear as important to the English mind as it does to the French, and even in France it has probably lost some of its importance with the passing of time. But the preface to the *Essais de critique et d'histoire* and the Introduction to the *History of English Literature* are of great value in understanding Taine's own approach to literature and French critical method in general during the last century. Taine regarded criticism as a natural history of the human mind, and no one can help noticing the frequency with which he borrows from the vocabulary of natural history and physiology. The Preface deserves to be read in full and there is only room for one quotation here:

> ' Entre une charmille de Versailles, un raisonnement philosophique et théologique de Malebranche, un précepte de versification chez Boileau, une loi de Colbert sur les hypothèques, un compliment d'anti-chambre à Marly, une sentence de Bossuet sur la royauté de Dieu, la distance semble infinie et infranchissable ;

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nulle liaison apparente. Les faits sont si dissemblables qu'au premier aspect on les juge tels qu'ils se présentent, c'est-à-dire insolés et séparés. Mais les *faits communiquent entre eux par les définitions des groupes où ils sont compris*, comme les eaux d'un bassin par les sommets du versant d'où elles découlent. Chacun d'eux est une action de cet homme idéal et général autour duquel se rassemblent toutes les inventions et toutes les particularités de l'époque ; chacun d'eux a pour cause quelque aptitude ou inclination du modèle régnant. Les diverses inclinations ou aptitudes du personnage central s'équilibrent, s'harmonisent, se tempèrent les unes les autres sous quelque penchant ou faculté dominante, parce que c'est le même esprit et le même cœur qui a pensé, prié, imaginé et agi, parce que c'est la même situation générale et le même naturel inné qui ont façonné et régi les œuvres séparées et diverses, parce que c'est le même sceau qui s'est imprimé différemment en différentes matières. Aucune des empreintes ne peut changer sans entraîner le changement des autres, parce que si l'une d'elles change, c'est par le changement du sceau.'[9]

I think that it will be conceded that this passage contains a good deal of sound common sense. Taine's theory of the relation between literature and society was not as obvious in 1866 as it is to-day ; but neither was the danger of his theory. We all know that a knowledge of the contemporary background can help us to understand the literature of a period, that a grasp of the doctrinal differences in the seventeenth century and of the conflict between Jesuit and Jansenist will enable us to appreciate some of the differences between Corneille and Racine ; but we also know that this knowledge can never be a substitute for literary judgment. It is not so much the theoretical side of Taine's system that is open to criticism, but his application of it to concrete cases. Although he insisted on the importance of the individual, he assumed in practice that once we know the *race*, the *moment* and the *milieu*, we can deduce the final term—the writer—from the first three. This approach sometimes prevented him from seeing the individual at all. The subject of most of his literary studies in not an individual writer, but a composite figure—*l'homme idéal et général*—a colourless abstraction deduced from the tendencies of his age in which

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the essential characteristics are lacking. This is strikingly illustrated by the study of Racine. Commenting on the line

Dans le fond des forêts votre image me suit

Taine remarks: '*Quand Hippolyte parle des forêts où il vit, entendez les grandes allées de Versailles.*'[10] It seems to me, as I have said in another place, that the force of the line depends on the fact that *fond* suggests infinite extension which has no limit and no term ; and by implication it comes to suggest the unexplored depths of the human mind or, as Taine more spectacularly puts it in another place, '*les gouffres où tout peut s'engloutir.*' It is clear that Taine's arbitrary association of 'forests' with Versailles ruins the meaning not only of this one line, but also of one of the greatest scenes in *Phèdre*. His Racine is a seventeenth-century courtier and no more, who would have been incapable of the astonishing analysis of emotion which we find in the plays or the extraordinary power of evocation which makes his poetry unique.

The best way of testing Taine's merits as a critic, however, is to study the paper on Balzac in the *Nouveaux essais*. The first time that we read it, it is difficult not to be impressed. Taine possessed a good sensibility, and the essay is concrete and extremely well documented. The vigour of the writing, the wealth of images and the apparent critical intensity make us feel that here at last is genuine literary criticism. The novelist's style is carefully analysed, its main characteristics are illustrated, praised or blamed as the case demands, and then labelled and put away. But as we get into the essay we become uneasy. Can this really be *literary* criticism, one wonders, or is Taine simply using his author to demonstrate the excellence of his own point of view. When Taine remarks of some of Balzac's characters:

> 'Les tirades de Mme de Montsauf sont presque aussi désagréables que les concetti de Shakespeare. La comtesse Honorine, qui meurt par excès de pudeur, écrit en mourant la lettre la plus indécente. Mme Claës, au lit de mort, laisse échapper des allusions physiologiques et des axiomes métaphysiques dont heureusement elle était incapable.' (p. 75).

—it is clear that he is not concerned with Balzac's faults *as a writer* or with the *invraisemblance* of his characters ; he dislikes

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them because their conduct shocks the susceptibilities of a mid-nineteenth-century gentleman whose women friends do not indulge in *axiomes métaphysiques* and who even on their death beds observe the *convenances*. Taine concludes from the behaviour of Balzac's characters that

> ' La vraie noblesse lui manque, les choses délicates lui échappent, ses mains d'anatomiste souillent les créatures pudiques, il enlaidit la laideur.' (p. 97).

When he writes, in an extremely revealing sentence, of *Eugénie Grandet*

> ' On a peur ici de la nature humaine ; on sent qu'elle renferme des gouffres où tout peut s'engloutir, tout-à-l'heure la religion, à présent la paternité '

—there is no longer any pretence of applying literary standards at all. The novelist has shown us something that was undreamed of in the philosophy of naturalism and Taine is incapable of dealing with these findings as a literary critic. The only way in which he can account for them is by attributing them to the novelist's ignorance of history:

> ' D'ailleurs cette amère philosophie manque chez lui de son contre poids, l'histoire, qu'il savait mal ; il oubliait que si l'homme aujourd'hui offre beaucoup de vices et de manières, l'homme autrefois en offrait bien davantage, que l'expérience agrandie a diminué la folie de l'imagination, l'aveuglement de la superstition, la brutalité des mœurs, l'âpreté des souffrances, et que, chaque siècle, on voit s'accroître notre science et notre puissance, notre modération et notre sécurité. Pour philosopher sur l'homme, ce n'est pas assez d'une observation exacte, il faut une observation complète ; et la peinture du présent n'est point vrai sans le souvenir du passé.' (p. 129).

The most curious thing about these passages is the conception of literature which emerges from them. There are many grounds on which Balzac's work can be criticized, but it is noticeable that Taine never at any point asks the question that a literary critic must ask—whether the *Comédie humaine* is, or is not, a valid criticism of the contemporary situation. He either argues that

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Balzac's work conflicts with the philosophy of naturalism, or with his own complacent belief that every day and in every way humanity was getting better and better; or where he can not deny the truth of the findings, he condemns them because they offend his sense of propriety. The underlying assumption is that literature should only interpret life as long as it does not shock or disturb, so that it becomes in the last resort a narcotic.

Taine keeps his parting shot for the last sentence of his essay:

> 'Avec Shakespeare et Saint-Simon, Balzac est le plus grand magazin de documents que nous ayons sur la nature humaine.'

Although this conclusion is thrown out with an air of playfulness, it is not a *boutade* but a perfectly serious statement of principle which informs the whole of Taine's criticism. In the Introduction to the *History of English Literature* he praises Stendhal because 'he treated feelings as they ought to be treated, that is to say, as a naturalist and a physician, by measuring and classifying them.' Ultimately, literature is valuable not as an experience, but as a document which tells us more clearly than any other how previous generations lived. 'It resembles,' he says, 'those admirable apparatuses with their extraordinary sensitivity which physicians use to detect the intimate and delicate changes which take place in our bodies.'

If Taine's approach had been due merely to the peculiarities of his age, there would be no point in dwelling on it. This curious performance, however, is by no means exceptional; it is the expression of a habit of mind which can be clearly discerned in a great deal of modern French criticism. Thus we find M. Ramon Fernandez writing in *Messages*:

> 'L'immense, l'incalculable intérêt de l'œuvre stendhalienne réside moins dans sa valeur intrinsèque que dans les renseignements qu'elle nous livre sur les caractères respectifs de l'autobiographie et le roman, sur les vicissitudes d'un esprit qui, avec un sens admirable des valeurs spécifiques, a su mener jusqu'au bout une œuvre autobiographique et une œuvre romanesque sans jamais perdre de vue leur différence irréductible ni les mêler l'une à l'autre.' (p. 94).

'The immense, the incalculable importance of the gas-cooker,'

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you might as well say, ' lies less in its intrinsic value than in the fact that it enables us to distinguish between the respective functions of the saucepan and the frying pan and allows the cook, with his admirable sense of the specific values of the different vitamins, to turn out a suet pudding and a pancake without ever losing sight of their irreducible difference or mixing one with the other.' For it is unfortunately true that French critics are inclined to waste their admirable gifts in attaching futile and often misleading labels, in making petty distinctions between the ' autobiography ' and the ' novel ' or in trying to measure the number of psychological *aperçus* we get from a great novelist's work, while the true function of criticism is miserably disregarded.

III. Sainte-Beuve.

Sainte-Beuve's reputation as a critic is something of a problem. As long as the supremacy of French criticism was unchallenged, he was fêted as the great European critic. It is hardly surprising that he has suffered severely from changing conceptions of the function of literary criticism. The danger of violent reactions is that they sometimes lead to injustice, and it would be a pity to let Sainte-Beuve's shortcomings as a critic blind us to his genuine achievement as a literary historian and as a propagandist for literature—as the apostle of culture to the new middle classes.

It is a curious fact that Sainte-Beuve's critics are seldom lukewarm. They either regard him like Amiel as ' the prince of French critics ' or they deny that he is, properly speaking, a literary critic at all. For those of us who are disposed to take the second view, it is a salutary exercise to read Rémy de Gourmont's paper on ' Sainte-Beuve Créateur de Valeurs ' in the first volume of the *Promenades philosophiques* which is probably the ablest defence of Sainte-Beuve that has ever been written. ' The critic like the philosopher,' said Gourmont, ' creates values. The work of art is not a conclusion. Where there is a conclusion there is always criticism.' (p. 33). According to Gourmont, the critic is primarily a judge and his function is to establish literary values, to decide where an author comes and whether we are right in admiring him. Until this is done the work of art remains incomplete. He goes on to say that Sainte-Beuve was responsible for

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fixing French literary values from Ronsard to Hugo—that he was, in fact, the person who 'created' the 'value' of French Renaissance literature, of Port-Royal and Chateaubriand.

This view of Sainte-Beuve's influence is generally accepted and it would hardly become a foreigner to dispute it. There is, however, another and more general ground on which the validity of Gourmont's defence can be impugned. Although the ' placing ' of writers is an important part of the critic's function, it is not the whole of criticism. From the great critic we expect something more than this.[11]

' Sound literary judgment,' wrote Gourmont in the same paper, ' is not purely intellectual ; feeling plays an important part in it. Now, feeling diminishes with age, or at any rate, the faculty of sympathy cannot be indefinitely extended and the moment comes when new arrivals, even if they still interest us, no longer excite us.' (p. 38). Sainte-Beuve's later criticism possesses merits which are not to be found in the earlier, but in the first essays he is much more of the literary critic than he was later on. Some of his best criticism was written between the age of twenty-five and thirty before his ' method ' had become hardened and dogmatic. The judgment is as sound, the mind freer and the sensibility more lively. His criticism of Racine in the three studies collected in the first volume of the *Portraits littéraires* still merits serious consideration ; it is persuasive and the case is stated with a moderation that was sometimes wanting in the later work. The dissatisfaction that we feel with the essays as a whole lies, I think, in the contrast between the critic's air of knowing exactly where the writer ' comes ' and what he ought to say about him, which has contributed so much to Sainte-Beuve's immense authority, and the comparative poverty of his detailed criticism.

> ' Le style de Racine se présente, dès l'abord, sous une teinte assez uniforme d'élégance et de poésie ; rien ne s'y détache particulièrement. Le procédé est d'ordinaire analytique et abstrait ; chaque personnage principal, au lieu de répandre sa passion au dehors en ne faisant qu'un avec elle, regarde le plus souvent cette passion au dedans de lui-même, et la raconte par ses paroles telle qu'il la voit au sein de ce monde intérieur, au sein de ce *moi*, comme disent les philosophes : de là une manière

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> générale d'exposition et de récit qui suppose toujours dans chaque héros ou chaque héroine un certain loisir pour s'examiner préalablement ; de là encore un ordre d'images délicates, et un tendre coloris de demi-jour, emprunté à une savante métaphysique du cœur ; mais peu ou point de réalité, et aucun de ces détails qui nous ramènent à l'aspect humain de cette vie. La poésie de Racine élude les détails, les dédaigne, et quand elle voudrait y atteindre, elle semble impuissante à les saisir.' (p. 106).

It is impossible not to be impressed by Sainte-Beuve's smooth accomplishment, by the skill and assurance with which he goes about his work. But the more we study the passage, the more doubtful we become whether it has anything to do with Racine or whether there is any correspondence between the critic's sensibility and the counters which he manipulates with such consummate ease. '*Rien*,' he says, '*ne s'y détache particulièrement*.' Now the aim of the critic is to prevent anything from sticking out too sharply, to 'create' the neat and accomplished craftsman whom Sainte-Beuve's contemporaries called Racine.[12] Thus the whole passage is a verbal construction in which every resource of style is devoted to evoking the genteel, the 'tender' Racine of the nineteenth-century myth. The emphasis therefore falls on the words '*élégance*,' '*abstrait*,' '*loisir*,' '*délicates*' and '*tendre coloris de demi-jour*.' The '*savante métaphysique du cœur*' (whatever that may be) is a neat way of evading the question of Racine's psychological acumen ; and, as though to make sure that the phrase shall be phrase and no more, Sainte-Beuve goes on to add '*peu ou point de réalité*'! That the emotions of Racine's characters were the result of artificial contrivance and were not dictated by 'inspiration' was of course a common criticism in the last century. It clearly suited Sainte-Beuve's purpose to assume that the criticism was just instead of testing its truth by a detailed examination of representative passages. The method of nineteenth-century criticism, as we have already seen, was to start from a general conception of an age and to deduce the individual writer from it. It was therefore necessary for Racine to be transformed into a 'courtier' and the discussion of his poetry, instead of being literary criticism in the true sense, is mainly an avoidance of criticism. Sainte-Beuve speaks of his style as though it were a separate entity

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and ' elegance ' and ' poetry ' simply ingredients. He points out, it is true, that the ' elegance ' was a product of ' le commerce paisible de cette société où une femme écrivait *La Princesse de Clèves*,' but its true social validity is not discussed. It does not occur to him, for example, that Racine's elegance, like the elegance of the society in which he lived, was a surface elegance which intensifies the ferocity of the passions beneath and the crumbling of the whole social order.

Although Sainte-Beuve criticized Taine shrewdly for trying to discover the writer from a study of his milieu, in many ways the theory formulated in his later work is not unlike Taine's. He, too, believed that criticism should be ' a natural history of minds ' ; and for Taine's study of the milieu, he substituted a study of the ' literary group.' It was not, he thought, sufficient to study the man ; the critic must investigate his family history and ' the first group of friends and contemporaries in which he was living at the moment at which his talent manifested itself, entered into possession of itself and became mature.'[13]

As this theory developed it led the critic almost inevitably further and further from his texts ; but it was not without its compensations. Sainte-Beuve's later criticism is less ' literary ' than his early work, but it is, perhaps, of more lasting value. Its great value lies in the skill with which he describes backgrounds and tendencies which is more illuminating than anything he wrote about ' style.' It is interesting to compare his discussion of the background of *Polyeucte* in *Port-Royal* with a passage on Corneille's style in the *Portraits littéraires*.[14]

> ' Le *Polyeucte* de Corneille n'est pas plus beau à tous égards que cette circonstance réelle (" la journée du guichet ") produite durant le bas âge du poète, et il n'émane pas d'une inspiration différente. C'est le même combat, c'est le même triomphe ; si *Polyeucte* émeut et transporte, c'est que quelque chose de tel était et demeure possible encore à la nature humaine secourue. Je dis plus : si *Polyeucte* a été possible en son temps au génie de Corneille, c'est que quelque chose existait encore à l'entour (que Corneille le sût ou non) qui égalait et reproduisait les mêmes miracles.'[15]
>
> ' La touche du poète est rude, sévère et vigoureuse. Je le comparerais volontiers à un statuaire qui, travaillant sur l'argile

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pour y exprimer d'héroiques portraits, n'emploie d'autre instrument que le pouce, et qui, pétrissant ainsi son œuvre, lui donne un suprême caractère de vie avec mille accidents heurtés qui l'accompagnent et l'achèvent ; mais cela est incorrect, cela n'est pas lisse ni *propre*, comme on dit. Il y a peu de peinture et de couleur dans le style de Corneille ; il est chaud plutôt qu'éclatant ; il tourne volontiers à l'abstrait, et l'imagination y cède à la pensée et au raisonnement. Il doit plaire surtout aux hommes d'état, aux géomètres, aux militaires, à ceux qui goûtent les styles de Démosthène, de Pascal et de César.'[16]

The first passage is a penetrating account of the relations between Corneille and contemporary society. It possesses the intuition which is essential to good history no less than to good criticism. But the second passage strikes me as commonplace and unfair. It seems impossible that the situation described in the first passage could have produced the work described in the second ; and if it did, then the relation between Corneille and his milieu must have been different from Sainte-Beuve's description of it. For the description of Corneille's style is little more than a reiteration of the conventional criticisms which are very ably disposed of in the eulogy of *Polyeucte*. The most interesting thing in the passage is the image of the sculptor used to define Corneille's style. Sainte-Beuve's early work is extremely rich in imagery. Now, there is no reason why a critic should not use images provided that they illuminate the work that he is criticizing. The great objection to Sainte-Beuve's imagery is that instead of illuminating his authors, it is at bottom a *substitute* for the critical distinction that one has a right to expect. There is not progress of thought ; one thing is described in terms of another for the purpose of artful denigration. In this respect his use of imagery reminds me of that of a journalist like Hazlitt rather that of a genuine critic like Mrs. Woolf at her best.

The reasons for Sainte-Beuve's failings as a critic are not difficult to discover. ' We judge a work of art,' said Lawrence, ' by its effect on our sincere and vital emotion and nothing else . . . A critic must be able to *feel* the impact of a work of art in all its complexity and all its force.'[17] No one knew better than Sainte-Beuve that a poem is a highly complex phenomenon, but he seldom

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managed to grasp it as a whole, seldom makes us feel that his criticism has behind it the whole force of his personality. In his discussion of a poem, there seems to be no continuity between the historian, the critic and the man who remain separate and distinct. It thus happens that though his writings contain interesting observations about language or the ' content ' of a work of art[18] he rarely gives us the ' feel ' of a poem. His response to his text is in general somewhat faint ; and when he does succeed in communicating the impact of a work on his own personality it will be found that the emotion is seldom or never generated by the work alone ; it is derived from some personal source that is only indirectly connected with it. In spite of his enthusiasm for scientific method, Sainte-Beuve was much less of a scientist or a philosopher than Taine. There was, indeed, a strange rootlessness—an absence of centre—in Sainte-Beuve as a man ; and though this was a serious defect in the critic, it enabled him to experience to the full all the extraordinary spiritual vicissitudes of the first half of the nineteenth century which makes him a figure of capital importance in understanding the atmosphere of his age.

I have lingered over Taine and Sainte-Beuve because they seem to me to be peculiarly representative of French critical method and because it is on their work that the fame of French criticism largely depends. They were both products of the French love of systems, of a completely realized conception of man and his place in the universe ; and they were both men who were passionately interested not perhaps in literature, but in culture and ideas. The work of both shows how a love of speculation spoilt that sensibility without which genuine literary criticism is impossible and how a natural love of authority, which may be a virtue, has a peculiarly disabling effect when the wrong authority is chosen. Neither curiosity about life nor mental agility is of much help alone in the education of public taste which is, perhaps, the first task of criticism. They both knew that literature was important, but Sainte-Beuve was unable to tell his public why it was important, and Taine's efforts to do so led him to turn it into a minor branch of history and psychology.

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[The concluding part of this essay will appear in *Scrutiny* for December].

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[1]*Prologue d'un essai sur la critique*, Paris, 1932, p. 21.
[2]*Œuvres complètes* (Ed. Planhol), Paris, 1927, I. pp. 218-9.
[3]Corneille's characters.
[4]*Op. cit.*, I, p. 194.
[5]Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, 1679.
[6]Hugon: *Social France in the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1911, p. 17.
[7]I have departed for my own purposes from the strict chronological order of the critics discussed in the three following sections.
[8]Reprinted in *Le chemin de velours*, Paris, 1902, pp. 209-10.
[9]*Essais de critique et d'histoire*, 2nd Ed., 1866, pp. 9-10.
[10]*Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire*, 3rd Ed., 1880, p. 188.
[11]It is perhaps the weakness of Gourmont's position that he was obliged to describe Boileau as ' a great creator of values,' though we know that he had a very low opinion of the intrinsic worth of his poetry.
[12]In view of Gourmont's judgment on Sainte-Beuve, the whole passage should be compared with the reference to Racine in the *Problème du style*, pp. 50-1, quoted later in this paper.
[13]For a good summary of Sainte-Beuve's critical position see *Nouveaux lundis*, III, pp. 15-33.
[14]Most of the essays in the first volume of the *Portraits littéraires* were written before *Port-Royal* and collected later. But a footnote makes it clear that they were intended by the critic to be read in conjunction with his later pronouncements and presumably still represented his view of the authors concerned.
[15]*Port-Royal*, II, p. 115.
[16]*Portraits littéraires*, I, p. 48.
[17]*Phoenix*, p. 539. It is only fair to add that the same page contains a remarkable tribute to Sainte-Beuve as a critic! For more favourable estimates of his critical ability see M. André Thérive's Introduction to a volume of selections published in a collection called ' Choisir ' (Desclée de Brouwer, 1936) and the review of it in the *Criterion*, July, 1937, pp. 716-721.
[18]Of *Phèdre* he wrote: ' La faiblesse et l'entraînement de notre misérable nature humaine n'ont jamais été plus mis à nu.' (*Port-Royal*, VI, p. 131).

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HARMONY AND COMPOSITION

IT falls to my lot as a reviewer of new books and music for several musical periodicals to see many of the new publications, English and American, which purport to explain to the student the principles of harmony. As these books seem often to have but the remotest connection with music, I have for some time had it in my mind to write a book on harmony which would start from quite different premises. The necessary leisure for this task has not, however, been forthcoming, so I welcome this opportunity for putting my thoughts on this matter in some kind of order.

It is perfectly true that the newer books on harmony approach the subject in a more enlightened manner, that is, the authors see the falsity of doling out rules to be followed unquestioningly by the student. For instance, Sir Edward Bairstow in his book *Counterpoint and Harmony* says:

> 'There has been a tendency in this country to teach counterpoint and harmony in such a way that students became stiff, cramped and unimaginative in their work. They were not encouraged to use their ears and their common sense, but were merely told that certain things were wrong and must be avoided. The view in this book has been adopted that nothing is wrong or right, but that if rules are observed, smoothness will result—no more and no less.'

Again, R. O. Morris in *Figured Harmony at the Keyboard* says:

> 'When I was young, harmony was taught exclusively by means of figured bass. One was given a bass with serried ranks of figures massed in close formation underneath it; in accordance with these hieroglyphics one put down various dots, dashes and smudges on the staves above, and took the result to one's teacher. He scanned it rapidly through, drew various parallel lines in blue pencil to show where the consecutive fifths and octaves were, and that was that. No attempt was made to regard the thing from a musical point of view, or to consider whether consecutive fifths have a less noticeable effect in some

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positions than in others. The lesson might have been regarded, conceivably, as an exercise in freehand drawing; it certainly was in no sense an exercise in music.'

And Giard, in his *Fundamental Harmonic Material* (an American treatise) says:

'There exists an irritating tendency on the part of many theorists to state rules of harmony as if they were so obviously true, so axiomatic in character as to require no explanation nor justification. Take for instance the usual custom of warning the student against two parts moving in octaves or unisons. Certainly the sound of consecutive octaves and unisons is not disagreeable, yet the student attempts to avoid them in order to adhere to a rule which makes no appeal whatever to his intelligence. It would be far more reasonable to explain that in four part harmony there are four separate melodic lines, and when two parts move in unison only three separate melodic lines are in evidence.'

But, however enlightened, the attitude is the same as in the older text-books, and it is this very attitude that I am venturing to criticize.

What is harmony? Certainly not an abstract thing, but something that is the direct outcome of the stuff of sound. This stuff of sound consists, in our European civilization, of twelve equally spaced semitones. We recognize that there are infinite gradations of pitch between each of the static semitones, but as the material of art has to be limited, these gradations have had to be ignored. However far then music seems to flow—and some musical masterpieces seem to flow into eternity—it never really moves away from the influence of those twelve magnetic centres. This release in bondage is one of the prime mysteries of art. Melody is the successive use of any of these twelve sounds, counterpoint is the combination of such melodic structures, and harmony is the result. All this is tacitly recognized in the usual text-books: what is not tacitly recognized is that when the ear became used to hearing counterpoint as fluid chords, those chords tended in time to be detached and thought of as *single sounds*, having the property, as real single sounds have, of combining with others. To try to find the *raison d'être* of modern harmonic methods by analysing down to the

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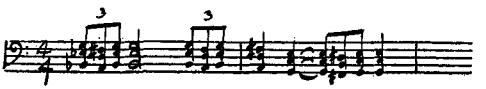
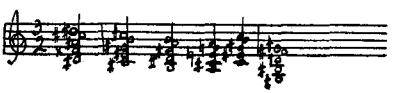
single note constituent is therefore, in many cases, quite false. Take, for instance, this progression, found in many of Vaughan Williams' works:



Is this accurately described as a succession of six-four chords? And is this, from Debussy's *La Cathédrale Engloutie*, to be described as consisting of consecutive dominant sevenths?



Obviously not, yet the ordinary text-book will lead the poor analyst to no other conclusions. Actually, in these two cases we have got back to a single unaccompanied melodic line. In this connection, it must be noted that a single sound is only a convenient name, for actually it consists of numerous sounds caused by sympathetic vibrations. The composers of the examples I have just mentioned are then but extending, complication and subtilizing the accretion of sounds that makes up the so-called single melodic note. Music can only rightly be termed harmonic when the sounds that make up the chords move independently: when, as in the examples given, everything moves in the same direction by the same steps, the music is purely melodic, and I am convinced that the only way of hearing such music is to take in the notes of the chords *en bloc*, in the same way that one would listen to early examples of organum, and not mentally dissect the chords into a number of constituents. In this sense of the use of the word 'harmony' we are led to the unorthodox opinion that this, from Beethoven's E flat Sonata, Op. 7,

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is harmonic in a sense which cannot possibly be applied to, say, the fuller and more sonorous phrases found in the ' organ ' section of Debussy's *La Cathédrale Engloutie*.

The bearing of all this on the subject of harmony teaching should by now be clearer. If I were to isolate one chord from the succession of chords given in the first two examples from Vaughan Williams and Debussy, I could conceivably analyse them and say 'Ah yes, six-four, resolve five-three,' or: ' dominant seventh, follow by tonic.' But in reality, such statements mean just nothing, for dominant sevenths, six-four chords and so forth have no absolute existence: they are *that or something else* according to what surrounds them. An analogy from another art, that of dancing, may make the point clearer. There has arisen in recent years a school of dancing which calls itself Greek. This dancing is modelled on the postures found in extant friezes, etc. It is an easy enough matter to adopt one of these postures, but as we have no knowledge of how the Greek changed from this posture to another, the so-called Greek dancing of our time is really only Greek posturing. Similarly, the harmonist has isolated harmonies and progressions (postures) from the classics, and the student is asked to move from one to the other by means of rules which have not the slightest universal validity. The results are what we know. The rules isolated from particular practice are valid for that practice and for no other. The harmonist preserves the heart and muscles of music in some kind of spirit and the student is at liberty to observe their anatomy ; but he doesn't see the heart beating and the muscles moving. This can only be done when the whole body is functioning. The argument for the usual text-book approach is of course that the student must learn that there is order in music—consequently, his first steps must be ordered, so that later he can use the wings of his imagination. Such an argument *sounds* perfectly logical. There is, however, one serious flaw in it. It is true that music, to be good, must be ordered, but the ordering cannot be imposed upon the substance of music. I therefore fail to see how the discipline of the usual harmony and counterpoint exercise can affect composition except to shackle it to academic standards. We say, in effect, to the student: ' Damp down your imagination for a few years until we have gone through chromatic harmony and fugue.' Or may be the two activities

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of harmony and composition are carried on simultaneously, so that what is given with one hand is taken away with the other. The same artificial ordering is apparent in the study of what is known as ' Form in Music.' I have seen enlightened text-books which as preliminary exercises give eight-bar rhythms upon which the student must construct a tune. And Sir Edward Bairstow, in the introduction to the aforementioned book, recommends that ' as soon as students have developed sufficient skill in part-writing, they can carry out this plan in composition by first of all taking as a model a short Minuet or Scherzo by Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven. Only the form should be copied—the length of phrases, the modulations, and above all the rhythmic contrasts and development of themes. The rest—themes, harmony and rhythmic divisions—must be original work.' To what can such discipline lead? Only to endless imitational music, of which the world has more than enough already. Such books ignore the fact that any idea the student may have *contains within itself* its own form and its own harmonic evolution. To impose these from without may make the music conform to, as we deem, respectable standards, but will hardly make it alive and interesting. Rules as we know them through the text-books have not been formulated from the works of any particular composer, Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, Brahms or Palestrina (actually it would be more interesting for the student if he could study a series of text-books each dealing with the harmony and contrapuntal procedures of one of the great composers), but are a sort of composite photograph of general tendencies. This gives them their colourless character. They are a series of abstractions upon which nothing of any value can be built.

What is the alternative? It is agreed that art must be disciplined: how attain that if abstracted rules are not allowed to shape the material? One can understand of course why the vogue of the text-book is so wide—it makes the task of the teacher so much easier. It gives him a foot-rule to measure with, it gives him cut-and-dried formulæ for dealing with any contrapuntal and harmonic situation, it relieves him from the necessity of using the imagination. All he needs is a blue pencil to exorcise those demons —consecutive fifths and octaves. When the student starts his harmony or counterpoint lessons he is usually familiar with much

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classical music, *i.e.*, the bases upon which Western music is constructed are already familiar to his ear, if not to his pen. Having this background, any musical idea that comes to him will conform to some particular idiom: his thinking will automatically revolve round Western scales and modes and not round those of other cultures. Bearing in mind this natural conformity of idiom, it should be the business of the teacher, not to force the ideas into greater conformity, but to help any personal traits to evolve unhampered by non-applicable rules. I am, of course, dealing with the claim of the harmony text-book that the training it gives is preparatory to composition. If the student's work shows no personal traits whatsoever, then I agree that a course of harmony training on orthodox lines will do no more and no less harm than a mathematical training, being a juggling with notes instead of with figures, unrelated to a specific and creative end.

Now, to come down to details. Suppose the beginner in harmony or composition were to bring to his teacher an unaccompanied melody. How is the teacher to set about criticizing it? Is he immediately to search for large leaps that take the tune away from a prescribed plane—is he to see that the modulations are right (in the text-book sense)—is he to see that there are not more than three repeated notes? He may, of course, do all of these things, in which case the final result of the so-called ' corrections ' will be a colourless tune devoid of all emotional significance. And the student in such a case will, if he knows his classics, be quite justified in protesting that many of Beethoven's themes leap from one plane to another, that Wolfe's songs contain scores of examples of more than three repeated notes in a melody, that Purcell's melodic modulations are anything but orthodox. On the other hand, he may take the more difficult path of criticizing, not from a fixed angle, but from the angle of the tune itself: *i.e.*, whether the tune does what it sets out to do. Supposing this simple tune were brought to a teacher:

If, instead of searching for things which contradict the orthodox ruling, we search for the characteristics of the tune, our criticism will

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be a creative and not a negative one. In this particular instance, the characteristic is the rise and fall of a third—all we must ask then is whether this particular characteristic has been used to the fullest advantage. Judged from this angle, we find that the second phrase, the notes of which move step-wise to a cadence similar to that in the first phrase, could be altered to conform to the prevailing movement by thirds. This results in:

But an orthodox judgment would lead to something like this:

because (1) the opening didn't clearly establish the key, (2) the cadential bars of the first and second phrases are similar and (3) there are too many successive thirds in the last phrase: all of which reasons have not the slightest *musical* significance.

Is there less discipline involved in the methods I advocate? Surely not. Rather more, for the discipline is achieved through the ideas themselves, and for this reason one's critical acumen is constantly changing its ground. Instead then of submitting to the student formal and rhythmic shapes to be filled in, my text-book would begin by giving numerous tunes, each of which has to be altered in order to develop to the maximum its particular characteristic, always preserving of course a related balance, tonally and rhythmically. When the student's mind and imagination have been well exercised by these means, then is the time to introduce counterpoint and its concomitant harmony. Now I do not at all see why, in these matters, the elaborations in modern music should be left out of account. Music, if it is alive, is contemporary, no matter when it was written, so that I do not see the necessity for ruling out in early contrapuntal exercises unorthodox dissonances. Counterpoint is dependent upon the nature of the tunes used, and is not something to be imposed upon the tunes from without. If

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a student brought me this example of two-part counterpoint

I'm very much afraid I should smile my approval and say ' Get on with it.' But I should not be nearly so pleased with this version, although it is very correct:

One may, of course, retort that my methods won't help the student to pass his Bachelorship and Doctorship in Music. Against this just criticism I have nothing to say, except to ask ' What are we teaching paper work for, if not to help the student's creative ability, however small, to unfold from its own natural bases?' The unnatural bases inculcated by normal methods induce either conformity or revolt, neither of which leads to the greatest art.

The harmonic method I have very briefly outlined is, of course, difficult to incorporate in a text-book, simply because the do's and dont's and ' exceptions to the rule ' that fill out the normal text-book would have no place. How then, shall it proceed after the already-mentioned chapters devoted to melodic writing? The next steps will be to two, three and four-part free counterpoint, which, bearing in mind the earlier melodic freedom, will be equally unrestricted as to dissonances, etc., *always provided that the ear of the teacher*, widely experienced in different kinds of music, *will approve of the logic of the progressions, given certain characteristics in the phraseology of the parts*. At the end of each chapter would be given a list of works that the student should thoroughly soak himself in: masses and motets of Vittoria, Byrd, Morales, Josquin des Prés and Palestrina, madrigals of Monteverde, Vecchi, Gesualdo, Wilbye and Weelkes, the masses of Bach, Beethoven and Vaughan Williams, Bach's Art of Fugue, the fugues of Mozart, and even the fugues in Sorabji's ' Opus Clavicembalisticum.' With perhaps the offer of a prize if he can find, in this mass of counter-

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point, more than one general principle: namely, that it is best to move by contrary motion.

By the time the student has had plenty of practice in this kind of four-part free counterpoint he will have become used to a far wider range of harmonic resource than is possible by other methods. Moreover, the equal exercise given to mind and imagination will have fitted him for developing his ideas in a personal way, for such will be but a continuation of his early exercises. I cannot insist too often that composition should be a consistent development from early contrapuntal and harmonic training, and not a free activity as opposed to a restricted one.

The remainder of my book would be analytical—showing how the harmonies arrived at by moving parts became detached and used as expressive and dramatic units. The recitatives in Monteverde's 'Orfeo' would be called upon to show up the falsity of the prevailing rules for harmonic progression. Schubert, Beethoven, Debussy and Vaughan Williams would yield numerous examples of the pliability of the common triad, while Hugo Wolf's songs would show how the augmented triad can be used for expressive ends. The student would thus be given opportunities for seeing how the same material is shaped to quite different ends, for realizing that the history of the art is not one of evolution but of change of emphasis. He must be made aware that he is dealing with pliable material, not something frozen in a mould.

EDMUND RUBBRA.

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A CLASSICAL EDUCATION AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY POETRY

THAT the eighteenth century suffered, for one reason or another, from an impoverished poetic sensibility is a fact too familiar to require emphasis. The claim that the minor verse of the century is interesting despite its lack of first-hand experience and intimate response, because it expresses a social order, or preserves the decencies, or anticipates the romantic revival, can only be a plea advanced for lack of a better. Pope and Blake are raised above their fellows by the sheer differentiation of genius ; outside their work it is the dignified expression of sincere commonplaces, of ' images which find a mirror in every mind, and sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo,' which represents the age's best achievement. These qualities are not negligible ; honest observation of men, faithful reflection of their thoughts and habits, call for estimable abilities in a poet, and we rightly admire Gray's *Elegy*, Collins' *Ode to Evening* and a few other pieces, the best of Johnson, Goldsmith and Crabbe, perhaps a little of Churchill. But the absence of anything but a dubious historical interest in nine pages out of ten of Johnson's *Works of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland* implies a fundamental inner weakness which has long aroused curiosity.

Explanations of course are ready to hand. Mr. Eliot's famous ' dissociation of sensibility ' describes what happened ; Mr. Willey's analysis in *The Seventeenth Century Background* of the quarrel between science and poetry gives cogent reasons for the change of intellectual climate. It is true that poetry suffered from a recognition that its materials were apparently of an inferior truth-status ; Granville's *Essay upon Unnatural Flights in Poetry* (1701) shows the effect of this recognition:

> ' The Poetic World is nothing but Fiction: Parnassus, Pegasus, and the Muses, pure Imagination and Chimaera. But

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> being however a system universally agreed on, all that shall be contrived or invented upon this Foundation according to Nature shall be reputed as Truth: But what so ever shall diminish from or exceed, the just proportions of Nature, shall be rejected as false, and pass for extravagance, as Dwarfs and Gyants for Monsters.'

That sense of make-believe together with the scientific simplification of language demanded by the Royal Society (and in France deplored in Boileau's famous complaint that Descartes had ' coupé la gorge à la poésie ') were without doubt debilitating. Yet sheer clarity of language did not necessarily impoverish—the most interesting uses of words in the century are those of Pope and Swift in whom an extraordinary grasp of clear expression coincides with the most fruitful duplicities, and who demonstrate that, given sufficient psychological tension, even ' easy and significant words ' may be as richly charged with meanings as those of a more elaborate vocabulary. It is typical of the century that its language should have most vitality in irony, where the difference between professed and real intention demands an active interplay—Gibbon, for example, is, after Swift, the most remarkable practitioner of such complex allusion, for any representative passage must be read in the context of all his prejudices and attitudes to yield its full effect. But in poetry (again excluding Pope and Blake as being each *sui generis*) the ability to make a ' simple ' language achieve any complexity of expressiveness was not only not widely shared, but not even coveted. Critical theory, in the matter of the poetic use of words, seems to have whored after strange gods.

Coleridge pointed to one of them which has hitherto received insufficient attention. In the first chapter of the *Biographia* he wrote as follows:

> ' In referring various lines in Gray to their original in Shakespeare and Milton, and in the clear perception how completely all the propriety was lost in the transfer, I was, at that early period, led to a conjecture which many years afterwards was recalled to me from the same thought having been stated in conversation, but far more ably, and developed more fully, by Mr. Wordsworth ; namely, that this style of poetry, which I have characterised as translations of prose thoughts into poetic

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language, had been kept up, if it did not wholly arise from, the custom of writing Latin verses, and the great importance attached to those exercises in our public schools.'

The question therefore arises: did the almost entire preoccupation of eighteenth-century education with the classics seriously affect critical notions of the functions of words in poetry, and help to preserve two principles enunciated by Hobbes and both detrimental to poetry, namely, that the dignity of a poem is lowered if it descends to practical or technical words (*cf.* Johnson's condemnation of those in *Annus Mirabilis*), and that the Judgment, which 'begets the strength and structure' of a poem, is to be preferred to the Fancy which seeks for the 'ornaments'? The further question occurs as to why, if this classical influence was pervasive during the eighteenth century, it should not have been so prominent both earlier and later. This essay in no way claims a single source for such linguistic debility; it simply tries to implement the hint which Coleridge and Wordsworth dropped, and to add this further explanation to those already proffered which concern the influence of the Baconian tradition and the long shadow cast by Milton.

It would be more logical to defer the question as to why classical influence was more prominent in the eighteenth century than at other times until the fact of its prominence had been proved. I prefer, however, to answer it conditionally now, and say that *if* such an influence came unduly to the fore, the explanation lies in a certain defenceless state in which the language found itself. The Holofernes of the Elizabethan age, the pedants satirized in Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller*, were as doughty Latinists as their Augustan successors, but all the efforts of the Gabriel Harveys could not stem the violent excitements which gave language its vitality through the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Many Elizabethans received a classical education, but it was only one—and nothing like the most powerful—of many forces which acted together (*cf.* L. C. Knights's chapter on Elizabethan prose in *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*). With the Restoration trend towards a simple order, classical education and classical practice were left to attract critical ideas with far more *proportionate* strength than they had hitherto done. The question of how those influences exerted themselves in the nineteenth century

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is a very complex one ; here again they would be only one strand of many, but in the case of *e.g.*, Landor, Tennyson and Arnold, an extremely important one. The reason why in the eighteenth century the classics might be expected to extend their own sort of magnetism widely is therefore the somewhat negative one that other and more violent stimuli were lacking, and that the age required something orderly and controlled.

The fact and nature of that magnetism remain to be explored. Its general effects might be deduced from Dr. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (p. 226):

> ' Unless very well taught, Latin verse composition is a bad instrument by which to train a mind in the appreciation of rhythm. A few very brilliant or very rebellious boys escape, but the rest receive the impression (often indelible) that good verses are simply those which fit a certain framework of rules, and that this framework is the measure of their rhythmical virtue. Applied to English verse the notion meets with a check in the fact that no set of rules has been found (or at least agreed upon), but the efforts of the rival schools of prosodists seem all directed towards establishing some set of rules, and the general impression that metrical excellence lies in regularity is encouraged.'

We remember Johnson's complaint that the Metaphysical poets very often wrote ' such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than the ear ; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.' A second general indication may be derived from Coleridge's phrase, the ' translation of prose thoughts into poetic language,' with its corollary that fine feathers make fine birds. Criticism, said Erasmus Darwin, looked upon the Muses as young ladies, and expected to see them dressed. Johnson therefore praises *Comus* as follows:

> ' a work more truly poetical is rarely found ; allusions, images, and descriptive epithets embellish every period with lavish decoration.'

(This recalls the man who said that his house was complete except for the architecture). And a third general indication is to be found in the desire to invest subjects with a spurious dignity ; Hobbes objects to ' the names of Instruments and Tools of Artificers, and

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words of Art,' Milton is guilty of an absurd inflation when he describes the way to strike fire from flint (P.L. X, 1070-1073), and Grainger, willing to mention but afraid to name so plebeian a beverage as rum, is commended by Johnson for his artful periphrases.

It is likely that the foundations of these practices were laid at school, and that they were reinforced by the upper-class guardianship of culture which in many ways bore such excellent fruits. The school-books of the time do not differ much from those of an earlier or later generation (educational practice remained approximately stable) but they provide a starting-point for the consideration of neoclassic language-habits. Charles Hoole's *New Discovery of an Old Art* (1660) is typical; boys are to draw sentences from their phrase-books, and then

> ' are to be instructed in what order to dispose them, and what Formulas they are to use in passing from one to another . . . not tying them to the words of any one author, but giving them liberty to contract or enlarge them ; so that they still contend to go beyond them in purity of expression.'

Elegance of phrase and ' purity of expression ' were primary considerations ; so also was logic of construction. Robinson's *Phrase Book for Winchester School* (1658) gives a representative treatment of the theme *Festina lente*, with examples—too long to quote—of the proper management of the seven parts of the fixed model, Propositio, Ratio, Confirmatio, Similitudo, Exemplum, Vetus Testimonium, and Conclusio. Inspiration is to be disciplined until it becomes logical, purposive, controlled, mechanical. Pope's *Receipt to Make an Epic Poem* merely burlesques an adult version of this process. Eachard had already been witty at the results (*Grounds for Contempt of the Clergy*, 1670): when an 'Academic youngster ' is ' put upon a Latin oration,' he writes,

> ' away he goes presently to his magazine of collected phrases ; he picks out all the Glitterings he can find: he hales in all Proverbs, Flowers, Poetical snaps, Tales out of the Dictionary, or else ready latin'd to his hand,' then ' he falls presently into the most lamentable complaint of his insufficiency and tenuity ; That he, poor thing, hath no acquaintance with above a Muse and a

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> half ; and that he hath never drunk above six-q. of Helicon, and you have put him here upon such a task, (perhaps the business is only, which is the nobler creature, a Flea or a Louse) that would much better fit some old soker at Parnassus than his sipping inexperienced Bibbership . . . Then he tickles over a little the skirts of the business ; By and by, for a Similitude from the Sun or Moon ; or if they be not at leisure, from the grey-ey'd Morn, a shady Grove, or a purling Stream . . . and so fearing he should break the thread of your patience, he concludes.'

Against this background we may consider the position of eighteenth-century poetry.

The minor men—and the major ones too, at times—were in a situation which looked advantageous but wasn't. Their education had begun with academic school exercises ; it had continued with a close study of, and in most cases a deep affection for, the classics ; Milton was coming into his full fame ; there was a persistent concern for the improvement of the language. The inspiration of nearly every critical effort of neo-classicism was, says Spingarn, ' the attempt to discover the secret of the greatness of the classics, and the means by which modern literature could profit by this age-long search.' But these factors, admirable in themselves, combined unfortunately to obscure the real vitality of the English language. Milton, it is clear, was a bad choice as a model. ' By writing in a foreign tongue,' says Dr. Tillyard of the *Defensio Secunda*, ' Milton has of necessity sacrificed the homeliness and freshness that enlivened the style of his English prose. We are remote from the language of everyday speech and frankly in the realm of rhetoric.' The observation applies, of course, to much of Milton's English poetry as well as his Latin prose ; again and again he hesitated between Latin and English as his poetic medium, trying to estimate which language would ensure the most lasting acceptance of his poetry and best fit the formal gestures required of the grand manner. The deductions from this indecision have, indeed, been drawn often enough. The resulting compromise, with its profound success in a small range of moods and effects, and its complete failure in most others, exerted a fatal fascination over his imitators. They had, too, to overcome Latin influences at first as well as second-hand. Their school-days had taught them the importance of

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Judgment (in the general design of their compositions) and Fancy (in the search of decorative dressings—*cf.* Hobbes) ; they had taught a generous use of periphrasis, a skilful handling of verbal structure (' the turn ' etc.) and a sense of design which kept the formal argumentative-demonstrative order of prose exposition, but heaped on whatever embellishments the subject could bear. When the cultured gentleman sat down to write Latin verse he was likely, not being able to reach the height of a Milton or Cowley, to turn out a rhetorical exercise, a mock-heroic burlesque, or a seriously ponderous treatment of a commonplace.

The main points of significance in the work of Restoration and Augustan Latin-versifiers are worth detailing since they are closely reflected in the practice of English poetry of the same time. They are the formal manner, a sense of virtuosity and only partly-concealed strain, and a general reliance on theatrical visual images and similes, deriving perhaps from a conventionally limited notion of imagery, which are easy to ' build into ' the course of the verse. (We may compare the way in which the ' Homeric ' similes of *Sohrab and Rustum* tend to be separate decorations and might as well be insertions into the poem ; or, for an eighteenth-century example, the way Gray's *Odes* tend to fall apart into a series of theatrical pictorial fragments). Beside this, there is a sense of structure, formal, external, and calculated, as though a poem were compounded of solid slabs. (In English poetry, compare the over-obvious architectonics—' Here . . . there . . . ' ' Behold . . . behold . . . ', ' Methinks I see . . . methinks I hear . . . '—which occur whenever an eighteenth-century poet indulges in vaticination. One might instance Tickell's *Ode on the Death of Mr. Addison*, which with all its dignity, good taste, and subdued poignancy never coalesces into a poem as distinct from an accomplished tribute in verse put together from separate units which do not interact or animate each other).

Addison was probably the most successful Augustan practitioner of Latin verse. Well-turned odes on official occasions or on the scientific inventions of the day, elegant burlesques and mock-epics, were his stock-in-trade, and the *Musarum Anglicanarum Analecta* which he edited garnered scores of poems on similar subjects by his brother authors. Surveying the ceremonial odes contained in these volumes we notice the strain of an assumed

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and ' official ' excitement, hyperbolical raptures and eulogy, an addiction to grandiose composition, virtuosity in periphrasis, and an artificial sense of structure. It is clear where Addison's own *Campaign* and *Letter from Italy* learnt their repetitive parallelisms, exaggerated ceremonial, stiff construction, and florid gestures. The extravagance is worlds removed from that of the metaphysical tradition where, even in the brilliant perversions of a Cleveland, the inspirational processes could not possibly be called crude. Both in Latin and English, such ceremonial verse, insisting on its dignity, limited the activities expected of poetry until a formal solemnity was left too often to take the place of sincerity.

At the risk of seeming more pedantic than necessary I must briefly outline two of Addison's poems. The first is the *Barometri Descriptio,* which opens by describing the miner's discovery of mercury in the bowels of the earth, and continues with the insertion of the liquid into a long tube and its consequent forecasting of the weather. The poem is carefully controlled ; it proceeds with a decorous gait, courteously bowing now on this side, now on that. It is agreeably diversified. Pope's words in the *Essay on Pastoral* might be adopted to describe it:

> ' this variety is obtained in a great degree by frequent comparisons, drawn from the most agreeable objects of the country ; by frequent interrogations to things inanimate: by beautiful digressions, but these short: sometimes by insisting a little on circumstances ; and lastly by elegant turns on the words, which render the numbers extremely sweet and pleasing.'

(The aptness with which this fits not only the *Pastorals* but neo-classic Latin verse suggests the affinity of spirit between Augustan Latin and English poetry). The metal is discovered and described, the barometer is made and its qualities detailed, with glimpses of the weather which accompanies its changes and the consequent effects on country life. Though the poem provides a formal pleasure, it relies entirely on commonplaces: it is not, and cannot be, a record of fresh experience. The careful canvassing of a set subject, the successful but conventional descriptions of natural scenes, the details of storm and sunshine, are emotionally and intellectually elementary: the structure is premeditated and its units lie amicably but not intimately side by side. In English verse, Thomson's

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Seasons derive from a similar conception of poetry. His descriptions even at their best suggest the prospectus—the poetic personality revealed is laborious and unsubtle. The poem proceeds by collection and development of visual impressions, and demonstrates that a mere *desire* to describe, and certain ability to do so, are doing duty for a compelling imaginative motive. The description of bird-songs in spring (*Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, p. 240) amasses its details as though a compendium of all the birds which ever sing is necessary for readers who are not used to hearing them sing at all. The descriptive units of which such poems (Latin or English) are composed spring from no imaginative necessity, and the accusation that the century generally lacked a lyric gift arises from the fact that poetic composition took place in the more superficial levels of the mind. Where there is an effect of unity and of personal emotion (Gray's *Elegy*, Johnson's *On the Death of Mr. Robert Levet*) it proceeds from the sincere sententiousness and uniform tone to which the better poets of the time could rise.

The other of Addison's poems which needs a word of mention is his mock-epic of the war between the pygmies and the cranes (*Proelium inter Pigmaeos et Grues Commissum*)—a typical heroic burlesque of the rivalry between the two empires, the battle led by valiant leaders (*cf.* the ' magnanimosque duces ' of the bees in the fourth *Georgic*), and the eventual extermination of the pygmies whose spirits now inhabit the vales of Elysium and return as tiny ghosts at night to haunt the green banks of their former country. The original has neatness, gaiety and skill, qualities not to be despised, but it is, of course, no more than an elegant amusement. The lines from Tickell's *Kensington Gardens* which are printed in the *Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse* under the heading of *Fairies*, are a very close parallel in tone and manner ; graceful, amusing, delicately turned, they call for a response only from a very limited number of faculties, and the greater part of the response might be summed up as an admiration for graceful artifice. Tickell's *Fairies* is Addison's *Proelium* in miniature ; as the Latin mock-heroic poem was a medium for the scholar-poet to show his abilities, a kindred tone of elegant banter suited the polite mode of English poetry. Sheer genius might raise the level to that of *The Rape of the Lock* ; otherwise the appeal remained on the plane of the polished and innocuous. The limited demands which on the whole

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the century made of poetry raised elegance, order, solemnity, and playful wit to pre-eminence—and they were the qualities which a cultivation of the classics would most naturally develop. For this among other reasons the century's greatest achievement lies in prose rather than poetry.

Elegance or elevation demanded the abandonment of the full resources of poetic language. 'There was before the time of Dryden,' says Johnson,

> 'no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to the particular arts . . . Those happy combinations of words which distinguish poetry from prose (*cf.* Coleridge's "translation of prose thoughts into poetic language") had been rarely attempted; we had few elegances or flowers of speech."

The impoverishment is obvious; Coleridge pointed it out in comparing (*Biographia*, chapter I) the passage from *The Merchant of Venice*, II, 6, beginning

> How like a younker or a prodigal
> The scarfed bark puts from her native bay

with that from Gray's *Bard*, beginning

> Fair laughs the Morn, and soft the Zephyr blows,
> While proudly riding o'er the azure realm
> In gallant trim the gilded Vessel goes,
> Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm—

where the intense vitality of the first contrasts with the solemnly moralized and generalized inflation of the second.

No single cause explains this impoverishment. The passion for imitation was partly responsible; the *Georgics* were repeatedly ransacked, Spenser, Milton, and Pope were an incongruous presiding trinity. But behind the immediate models there lay more general assumptions about the 'poetic,' about the kind of elevation required. Wordsworth, of course, recorded that he had been

> Misled in estimating words, not only
> By common inexperience of youth,

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> But by the trade in classic niceties,
> The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase
> From languages that want the living voice
> To carry meaning to the natural heart.

' Moderation ' was preferred to the intimate revelation of passionate feeling ; Robert Lloyd praised Milton as ' more correctly wild.' Wildness was, as it were, indispensable, according to ancient theories of poetic vaticination, but it must be civilized—*ut cum* ratione *insanias*.

And secondly, a serious insensitiveness to the complex life of words followed from the attitude which viewed them from the ' outside,' from the superficial notions represented by Dryden's dictum that the words are

> ' the colouring of the work, which, in the order of nature, is last to be considered. The design, the disposition, the manners, and the thoughts are all before it.'

It is relevant to refer to Bridges' distress at Hopkins' ' Oddity and Obscurity ' and the implications of his comments on Hopkins'

> ' faults of taste, which few as they numerically are yet affect my liking and more repel my sympathy than do all the rude shocks of his purely artistic wantonness.'

Cf. too as particularly relevant to the eighteenth century the following from *How to Teach Reading*, p. 44:

> ' The " classic " . . . is trained to regard literature as a matter of manipulating language according to rule and precedent —language divorced from experience. The resulting " taste," " judgment " and " sense of fitness " (usually so strong in the " classic ") are almost insuperable bars to the development of critical sensibility.'

The bars, at any rate, are difficult to surmount without the realization that there are more organic things than ' taste,' etc., to be looked for ; in a century when such inadequate criteria were accepted without question it needed the radical originality of Coleridge to suggest a more fruitful approach to language. This is not to deny that superb results can follow when such criteria are used with the independence of a Dryden or Johnson.

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The results of the general insensitiveness may be examined in Gray's *Odes*. They were indeed at first unpopular, yet the trend of linguistic development makes them natural products of their age. It is impossible to accept, say, the *Ode on the Spring* seriously. It has a baroque charm ; its warmth of colour, decorative personifications, and playful solemnity give it individuality, though hardly perhaps of a different sort than if it were a scene painted on an opulent ceiling. The ' rosy-bosom'd Hours ' borrowed from the Spirit's last speech in *Comus* emphasize the gap between Milton's genuine sensuousness and Gray's floridity. The opening lines display a perfunctory wonder ; the ' long-expecting ' flowers (how elementary an epithet) are ' disclosed '—the histrionic gesture. It is pedantry ' to wake the purple year ' in *English* poetry. The classical pretence in imagery, mythology, and vocabulary is a fundamental weakness ; the immediate lapse into conventional moralizing is only partly redeemed by the bantering tone ('At ease reclin'd in rustic state '). The anthropomorphic banality of the ' insect-youth ' who suggest the transience of man gains nothing from one's recollection of the fourth *Georgic* (*cf.* the ' emissa iuventus ') since the effect is merely one of clumsy triviality. (By a pardonable association, the mind turns to Carroll's little oysters). ' Float amid the liquid noon ' is an admitted borrowing from Virgil (' nare per aestatem liquidam '): the following line (' Some lightly o'er the current skim ') in all probability derives from the same source (' flumina libant summa leves '), and the next two come admittedly from Milton. In each case the borrowing is pedantic and clumsy. The poem lapses, symptomatically, into ballad rhythms which almost parody the banal moralizing, and the final subsidence into playfulness, after several disconcerting hesitations of tone, suggests its origin in a mere indecisive ' desire to write an ode.' Even in the phrases which escape the general insensitiveness (*e.g.*, ' the busy murmur glows ') the debt is normally to a Latin original (*cf.* ' fervet opus,' *Georgic*, IV, 169) rather than to personal observation. This inbred literary manner characterizes all the odes, and too often joins with the histrionic emptiness so pronounced in *The Bard*— which might be characterized as an exercise in the art of formal gesture. We think of the portraits whose subjects lean on urns and flourish a carefully-posed hand to express a premeditated mood—

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On a rock whose haughty brow
Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,
Rob'd in the sable garb of woe,
With haggard eyes the Poet stood ;
(Loose his beard, and hoary hair
Stream'd like a meteor to the troubl'd air),
And with a Master's hand, and Prophet's fire,
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.

(As unconscious parody, there is the passage from *Reflections upon Theatrical Expression* quoted in F. C. Green's *Minuet*:

> ' In *Astonishment* and *Surprise* arising from *Terror* the *left leg* is drawn back to some distance from the other: under the same Affection of the Mind, but resulting from an *unhop'd-for Meeting* with a beloved Object, the *right leg* is advanced to some distance before the left.' And so on).

The *Odes*, it is sufficient to say, are literary through and through, and the debt is to a language which has dulled Gray's feelings for the resources of his own tongue—despite the perspicacious comments on Elizabethan and Augustan language in the letter to West in 1742. It is of course impossible to apportion the blame in exact degrees between too great an attention to Latin originals and the faults of a scheme of education ; but one easily agrees with Wordsworth that Gray ' was at the head of those who, by their reasonings, have attempted to widen the space of separation betwixt Prose and Metrical Composition, and was more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction.' *Curiously elaborate* . . . The anthropomorphism of the *Georgics* is in the genuine Latin manner—mature, unaffected, simply and dramatically descriptive: that of English imitations (and translations—Dryden's version of the Fourth, for example) is stilted, artificial, explicit, and melodramatic. The contrast again between the complex vitality of movement, metaphor, and emotional detail in the honey-bees passage of *Henry V* (Act I, Scene 2) and the superficial, pompously-playful anthropomorphism of the *Ode on the Spring* is significant, not only of the different powers of the respective poets, but of the devitalization which followed too close an adherence to Latin models and practice. ' Easy poetry is universally admired,'

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said Johnson, in No. 77 of *The Rambler*, referring principally to technical facility: that the emphasis should have been laid in this way is a sign of the flaccidity produced by the pursuit of good form.

Attention to mediocrity is justified only if it suggests why the object of scrutiny was mediocre. Though Johnson pleaded for the 'modern writers of Latin poetry' as 'a class . . . too generally neglected,' no one is likely to profit much from perusing their compositions. As a contributory cause of a general debility they may, however, be worth the attention of this essay; they suggest one explanation of a historic fact, and they offer a caution—that an educational system unconcerned with a full appreciation of English poetry, or engrossed by a desire for gentility in the literary product, is producing attitudes which largely disable for the judgment of English literature. In the case of the eighteenth century, as at any period, linguistic possibilities were controlled by a complex tissue of forces; but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that when, for the reasons suggested by Mr. Eliot and Mr. Willey and others, the writers of the late seventeenth century (well aware of a crucial change in the air) decided that the language needed retrenchment and reform, they left it peculiarly open to the influences of a classical training—for good and for bad; more so, at any rate, than it had been earlier, when the trend towards conformity competed weakly with a high degree of individualism, and more so than it was to be later, when the guardianship of letters passed away from a cultured upper-class. The abandonment in the late seventeenth century of linguistic exuberance in favour of a classically-controlled and disciplined simplicity made language poorer from the point of view of poetry. Tickell's words on Addison sum up the case well:

> 'An early acquaintance with the classics is what may be called the good-breeding of poetry, as it gives a certain gracefulness which never forsakes a mind that contracted it in youth . . . If Mr. Addison's example and precepts be the occasion that there now begins to be a great demand for correctness, we may justly attribute it to his being first fashioned by the ancient models, and familiarized to propriety of thought and chastity of style.'

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To be ' correct with spirit, eloquent with ease ' was not an unworthy, but merely an inadequate, ideal. The attack which Wordsworth and Coleridge were to make on this impoverished gentility was radical enough, but even so it did not enable the linguistic habits of nineteenth-century poetry to link themselves with those of the pre-Restoration period. Such matters demand more examination that it is possible to give them here ; as far as the eighteenth century goes, a single essay must content itself with suggesting that there is a persistent likeness between the current assumptions about English poetry and the standards inculcated by attention to the classics, and that the demands for metrical excellence, allusive periphrasis, correctness, elegance, ' embellishments,' judgment, and ' easy and significant words ' applied as it were from the outside are largely the responsibility of the classic creed.

A. R. HUMPHREYS.

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COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

THE AMERICAN CULTURAL SCENE.

The third article in Mr. H. B. Parkes' series, *The American Cultural Scene*, will appear in the next number of *Scrutiny*, that for December.

THE SPENS REPORT.

The Editors hope to publish in the December number a review of the *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education*, drawing on a number of commentaries which they have received on the Report.

THE FUNCTION OF THE UNIVERSITY.

The University of Oxford has conferred an honorary doctorate upon Mr. P. G. Wodehouse. Similar honours were at the same time conferred upon Sir Edmund Chambers and Sir Herbert Grierson. Sir Edmund Chambers and Sir Herbert Grierson are very distinguished scholars. Mr. Wodehouse is—well, according to Mr. Belloc he is 'the best writer of English now living' (see the introduction to the *Week-End Wodehouse*). English masters and mistresses will no doubt have noted that the standard has been endorsed by the highest academic authority.

Mr. Wodehouse is also, of course, a large-scale producer of humorous fiction for the magazines, which sells fabulously in book form, and no one grudges him that kind of success. But those highbrows who (being challenged to read and approve) find the quality of the product no higher than the circumstances of production and publication would lead one to expect must feel that Mr. Wodehouse's new triumph is something of a date in cultural history. Would anything of the kind have been possible even fifteen years ago? There may, of course, be an excessive lack of sympathy in the view that his humour is a cross of Prep-school and *Punch*, his invention puerile, the brightness of his style the inane, mechanical and monotonous brightness of the worst schoolboy slang (the whole point of which, in so far as it has any, lies in its shamefaced

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rejection of the standards of maturity—Mr. Wodehouse's humour, according to the view in question, works within the ethos of that slang: there is no criticism from outside). But Mr. Wodehouse is certainly incomparably less of an artist than the late W. W. Jacobs, whom no university would have considered honouring. Dons to-day, however, are not highbrows.

Miss Dorothy L. Sayers is also widely thought in universities to write well. Admirers of hers in the world at large are now wondering whether the well-known constitutional anti-feminism of Cambridge means that Cambridge has no chance of catching up with Oxford.

F.R.L.

THE END OF THE 'MODERN MOVEMENT'

WYNDHAM LEWIS THE ARTIST, From 'Blast' to Burlington House (*Laidlaw and Laidlaw, 15/-*).

ART LIES BLEEDING, by Francis Watson (*Chatto and Windus, 7/6*).

It is only fitting that the most redoubtable personality in English Art should now write the concluding chapters to an epoch which is rapidly drawing to a close. An extraordinary epoch it has been, too, that began with high hopes and such a genuine revolutionary impulse, and has fizzled out in a peculiarly unimpressive splutter. For, one may as well face up to it, 'The Modern Movement in Art,' in all of its manifestations, is no longer very modern and has ceased to be a movement in any real sense. 'What has already happened,' thus Wyndham Lewis, '—that can be said at once—is that modern art of the highly experimental sort, advocated in these essays and manifestos (*Blast*, *The Tyro*, etc.), is at an end.' There is, needless to say, still a certain amount of twittering in the revolutionary dovecotes, the rear-guard struggling bravely to the fore still cuts a caper or two to prove it was there when the fight was on. In the back waters of Mayfair the little 'advanced' galleries continue to stage shows of cubists, expressionists, surrealists, of Abstract and Constructivist art, or resuscitate the

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' isms ' of the day before yesterday. But a forlorn atmosphere, a sense of unreality, informs them all ; it is obvious one is assisting at a parade of ghosts.

In London that was only to be expected. 'As things peter out on the continent, they come over here on tour ; that is the rule.' We are always a little slow on the uptake where the visual arts are concerned, one must allow for the regulation British time-lag, which, incidentally, seems to be operating in other departments of life as well nowadays. In Hampstead it is considered terribly ' modern ' to imitate a Picasso style of a decade or so ago, and occasionally canvasses still change hands at fairly attractive prices. But that doesn't mean anything. Such collectors as still frequent the galleries for the purpose of buying pictures instead of merely hobnobbing with Bohemia, are of a peculiar breed, the sort of people who commission the most hair-raising surrealist to paint altar pieces for the village church near the country seat where they and their friends repair for the week-end cocktail party. Otherwise there is very little doing and the market is slumping badly. And if anyone is curious to know how the business is still carried on, he can read it in Mr. Francis Watson's well-documented book, which gives you all the tit-bits complete with chapter and verse. The upshot of it all is that the breach between the artist and his public is immense and apparently unbridgeable. In spite of its popularization and exploitation by the poster world and in certain spheres of industry, there is not the slightest doubt that ' modern ' art, more specifically, the revolution in the Arts that began round about the turn of the century, is to-day as dead as the proverbial dodo.

In that revolution Wyndham Lewis played a conspicuous, indeed, a leading role. In fact he is the only native born artist who originated a movement on this side of the channel and became a chef d'école *at the same time* that things were happening in Paris. And although Vorticism, trumpeted by its organ *Blast*, had only a short innings and was cut short by the Great War, Mr. Lewis has nevertheless kept his finger on the pulse of the times ever since.

In the book under review Mr. Lewis has collected all his more important writings on Art and has added a long introductory essay in which the whole period is reviewed, the present situation summed up

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and a possible line of attack for the future indicated. Contrary to those now ' reactionary ' artists who blithely go on cubing, surrealizing and abstracting, Mr. Lewis advocates a return to Nature. In true ' enemy ' fashion he plumbs for what he calls *super-naturalism*, that is, for precipitating himself on the mystery called ' nature,' and while ' burying Euclid deep in the living flesh,' never to remain unconscious ' of those underlying conceptual truths that are inherent in all appearances.' It is the only method, Mr. Lewis contends, whereby the artist stands a chance of regaining his public, of becoming ' popular ' once more. The various phases of Mr. Lewis' art, from Vorticist to Burlington House (*i.e.*, the famous portrait of T. S. Eliot rejected by the Royal Academy) are well illustrated by reproductions, which include, among other things, the remarkable ' Inferno ' exhibited at the Leicester Galleries a year ago.

What, then, has happened? To this question no simple answer is possible, but obviously the situation in the Arts cannot be divorced from the general cultural and social problem in Europe. In previous articles in this journal I have already discussed certain aspects of this problem in so far as it has a bearing on the Arts, so that it is unnecessary to go over the same ground again. But for all practical purposes, it may be said that the reason Art has reached a sort of dead end, and, what is equally serious, that the genuine artist has in a manner of speaking been betrayed, may be attributed directly to the excesses of Surrealism and the Abstract cult. Surrealism in particular has given Art the *coup-de-grace*. After the tedious antics of M. Breton and his travelling circus the already bemused public can hardly be blamed for feeling that it has been fooled once too often. Still, they are marvellous publicity men, these surrealists, the ordinary man at least can appreciate that, and O Boy! what business they have brought to such firms as Schiaparelli, not to mention the New York World Fair, where that skilful if rather academic painter Salvador Dali has an exhibit all to himself, full of live Venuses under water, bandaged cows, upside-down umbrellas, phallic symbols and, of course, the obligatory protruding viscera! It is all very amusing, no doubt, but for anyone who still retains a serious interest in the Arts it is sad to reflect that this is the end of it all, a few earnest but second-rate people abstracting themselves practically

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speaking from life altogether, and a whole troupe of clowns exploiting their infantilisms in public to the applause of eager debutantes and the somewhat faded smart set generally.

It is with a sense of relief, therefore, that one salutes Wyndham Lewis' book, surely one of the most important publications of its kind to appear since the war. To read Mr. Lewis' vigorous and incisive writings, some of them, like the ' Notes and Vortices ' from *Blast*, penned more than a quarter of a century ago, after listening to the feeble tittle-tattle of the salons and the studios (where of course the ingenuous Professor Read is always ready at a moment's notice to fit out the latest *ism* with a brand-new portentous philosophy) is an exceedingly refreshing experience. It is not surprising that in 1914 he was going a bit too fast even for the professionals, and to-day, clearly, he is again a long way ahead of our ultra-modern vanguard. In *The Caliph's Design* (1922) he accurately analysed the dilemma of Post-Impressionism and foresaw the eventual *impasse*.

> ' The emotional impulse of the latest phases of the movement in Paris looks to me contradictory to the creative impulse in painting. And more clearly, it seems to preclude the development of any sensibility but that of exasperated egotism. The eye becomes a little gluttonous instrument of enjoyment. Or it watches from the centre of its abstract brain-web for more flies and yet more flies. It would eventually become as mechanical and stupid as a spider, if it is not already that.'

In part IV of this fascinating pamphlet Mr. Lewis dealt with the vital question of the relation of the artist to his environment. He emphasized the difficulties of his working conditions, handicapped as he is by the absence of a coherent and generally accepted philosophy and the decaying social fabric. It is not enough, if Art is to remain in a healthy condition, to take ' a specialized visual interest in the debris on your table, or the mandoline you have just bought,' in other words, to disintegrate the visible world and build up the bits into fascinating patterns according to your private fancy.

> ' Your interest in the forms around you should be one liable to transfigure and constantly renew them: that would be the creative approach . . . Braque and Picasso have, indeed, changed the form content before them. Witness their little

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Nature-morte concoctions. But it has only been the debris of their rooms. Had they devoted as much of their attention to changing our common life—in every way not only the bigger, but more vital and vivid, game—they would have been finer and more useful figures.'

That is all very well however. But isn't it asking rather too much of the artist? And how is this changing of our common life to be accomplished save by engaging in activities that are very apt to prove inimical to the finest effort in Artistic creation? The only life the artist can concentrate attention on and change to any purpose is the individual life. It is undeniable that a radical change is desirable before Art can be regenerated. But whatever the quality and integrity of the individual artist, the fact remains that the inner direction of what for the sake of convenience we still call Civilization is at present against him. In consequence he is driven into isolation and becomes indifferent to the life around him. By way of self-protection he begins to regard this indifference as a virtue.

'Intellectual exhaustion is the order of the day: and the work most likely to find acceptance with men in their present mood is that work that most vigorously and plainly announces the general bankruptcy and their own perdition. For the need of expression is, in a sense, never more acute than when people are imperturbably convinced of its futility. So the most alive became the most life-like wax-works of the dead.'

But in England such a state of affairs is regarded by the 'advanced' cliques as being synonymous with 'culture,' for the salvation of which everyone is now required to rush headlong into the fray.

'There is no great communal or personal force in the Western world to-day, unless some new political hegemony supply it, for Art to build on and to which to relate itself.'

That was in 1922, and certainly things look a little different to-day, but whether the changing circumstances will be accompanied by a revival in the Arts, still depends on many apparently dissociated and incalculable factors.

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Mr. Watson's book is useful in so far as it dots the i's and crosses the t's of Wyndham Lewis' arguments. With epigrammatic verve it tells the bewildered layman exactly how artists nowadays live or don't live. But the underlying assumption seems to be, that if only things were managed a little more intelligently, if there were more enlightened official encouragement in this country, things needn't look so bad after all. The 60,000 young people who yearly crowd into our art schools (for reasons best known to themselves) might yet be contributing something useful. Mr. Watson gives you intriguing glimpses behind the scenes, supplies interesting information about what certain institutions do with the funds entrusted to them for the purchase of works of art, explains the attitude of town councillors towards the whole business, and in a general way succeeds in making the answer to the question, how there comes to be any art at all these days, more obscure than ever. One fact, however, to which Wyndham Lewis also draws attention, emerges quite clearly. Under present conditions professionalism in Art is on the decline. The professional artist who lives exclusively by his work and doesn't eke out a livelihood with teaching, industrial designing, etc., is becoming rarer every day. And the solemn buffoons (self-appointed protectors of the working-class, as a rule) who imagine they are fulfilling some high social purpose by encouraging miners, motor mechanics and office boys to paint pictures, and then tout round these productions as something to be gaped at admiringly by sentimental intellectuals, are only hastening his demise. It is very jolly of course for the unemployed factory hand to know that his humble dabblings are taken up by a first-class publicity racket, and that he is as good as the trained fellow who has spent a lifetime at the job any day, but that kind of thing is hardly calculated to add prestige to a great profession. There are signs, however, that this sort of nonsense at least will disappear before very long. And reading Wyndham Lewis it is possible even to be more hopeful of the future. It implies a long view no doubt and will demand great courage of the artist, a fresh attitude and a new and rigorous discipline.

RICHARD MARCH.

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RONALD BOTTRALL

THE TURNING PATH, by Ronald Bottrall (Barker, 5/-).

The publication of a new book of poems by Mr. Bottrall is still an important event in the literary world. When *The Loosening* first appeared, it was clear that Mr. Bottrall had, at least, a better recipe for the manufacture of verse than most others of his own generation. The rehabilitation of the Muse through a newly-awakened social consciousness had turned out to be little more than ventriloquism as the red dawn faded into clouds of Rugger Fifteen metaphysics, and even Auden's ambivalent symbols, with their inconsistently politico-Freudian interpretation, emerged (after initial promise) as too facile an attempt to short-circuit the problem of relating the difficulties of the individual consciousness to the conditions of the society in which it operated. And one didn't need to read Empson's criticism to suspect in even his very good best verse something of a technical *tour de force.*

Mr. Bottrall avoided the too easy resolution by going behind politics (the tip, of course, was Eliot's) to social anthropology. He was thus able to find terms, like the hoarding and the gramophone, which, while possible objects of immediate perception, were at the same time significant factors in the complex of social relationships. This central concern he expressed with a technical equipment which had assimilated most of the better influences of his time, utilizing the confident (and sometimes crude) run of the early Eliot satires and of the first three sections of *The Waste Land,* and the realization in muscular imagery and movement of psychological anatomization exploited by Hopkins ; and occasionally the self-consciously analytical rhythms of *Mauberley.* The result was verse which, though sometimes ' slick,' was usually pointed and rarely dull. If one later found the *Festivals* somewhat pretentious, one recalled that Mr. Bottrall was still young, and the eaglet could stretch its wings without undue loss of dignity.

In the present collection Mr. Bottrall has lost none of his technical competence and certainly none of his confidence. And if nothing else raised one's suspicions, the readiness one feels to talk about ' technical competence ' in abstraction in connection with the verses in this volume suggests a misdirection of interest originating with the author. The poem, *To a Chinese Girl,* by which

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Mr. Bottrall was represented in the Pelican Books anthology, has these lines:

> Fifty proportioned pigments will combine
> In deeper values, but vague ampersands
> Choke the lacunae of our strict design.
>
> Unhurrying time our universe expands,
> We plot in vain the ever-changing centre,
> Our grain-concorded star-strewn cloud disbands
>
> And we are left, ourselves our own tormentor.

The tone and method are familiar, but it isn't *Legal Fiction* or *To an Old Lady* of which one is reminded, or even of the staple of Empson's verse, but rather of those labyrinthine pages of *Seven Types* which continue to analyse a line of a Shakespeare sonnet past all possible limits of relevance. The lines quoted here are so clearly contrived from outside that it is impossible even to begin to apprehend them until a careful paraphrase has been made, and then one finds no subtlety of experience to justify the superficial complexity. The first verse quoted appears to mean that a picture may express something over and above the significance of its separate elements, but Occidental philosophy is not logically systematic ; no doubt perseverance could extract endless ramifications of the Principle of Organic Unity, but the words suggest no fusion of association to justify such analysis ; they seem intended to obscure rather than to express the meaning.

Mr. Bottrall is conscious of the dangers of over-intellectualization (he is ever-presently conscious of all the criteria of good verse), and he is careful to supply Mr. Eliot's subterranean deficiencies.

> We that came here in the first leap of sex,
> With the shy, sky-entreating breasts of a girl in her teens,
> Looked out over roofs and courtyards, saw the rain
> Falling in gold bars against the sun, saw the pink beech
> Shoots wait furled. In a cup between humped mountains
> Where bishop's mitred azalea buds etch
> The declivities we learnt the quick pain
> That hot nearness of body gives to body,
> And the fragmentary easement of casual excess

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runs his *Prologue*, and here his verse seems to me fully adequate to his purpose. His statement of the problem is excellent enough, outlining the dichotomy between the primitive sources of vitality on the one hand and the ramifications of intellect on the other that characterizes a mechanistic civilization. But this is too often a statement of Mr. Bottrall's own case. His verse is characteristically either an intellectual construction that describes, without expressing, the problem or situation, or a realization of directionless experience in the solar-plexus. In the nature of the case the record is more rhythmically significant than the first, but necessarily fails to produce anything more than an orgasmic effect upon the reader.

This, apparently, is the only result of Mr. Bottrall's closer approach to the problems (problems at once of psychology, sociology and verse-technique) raised in his earlier work: not, as one hoped, an increased sensitiveness with accompanying psychological insight and rhythmic subtlety, but a bifurcation of interest and method. The best verse in this volume recalls the *Loosening* poems, though the movement is significantly more brittle:

> Revengers against time we have denied
> Ourselves the lifted head, relied
> On the pistol, the pacers, the held stop-watch . . .

or more crude:

> Prove worthy of your high destiny
> By a stern control over petty emotion.
> Do not flinch at a hæmorrhage or a spatter
> Of brains . . .
> . . . For the high
>
> There are glittering prizes,
> And the low, too, have some honour. Sacrifice,
> The quiet submission to bacilli,
> To throttling, lung-rotting gases, to the great
> Will of the people, we readily accept

or else, as I have suggested, is a statement of Mr. Bottrall's own case:

> Time was, in the days of pilgrimage,
> When the equinox leapt as a ram, green

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As an emerald at the moment of its cleavage,
When the world ran rippling in a rune.

Now, constricted in an agony of labour
We retch our hearts out, tearing the sublime
To intricate motives, adequate to the hour,
And envy no man's pedestal of rhyme.

It is significant that this last reminds us of *Mauberley* ; for the composition of his own epitaphs is never likely to prove a very fertile occupation for a poet.

R. O. C. WINKLER.

POST-MARXIST CRITICISM

THE POET AND SOCIETY, by Philip Henderson (Secker and Warburg, 7/6).

Mr. Henderson was lately a Marxist critic, but in the present book he prefers to pass as the impartial judge of current critical theories and attitudes. The book is recommended on the dust cover as ' independent of both cliques and movements,' but its independence, it is to be feared, is of that determined variety which is more concerned in denying affiliations than in arriving at any conclusions. One would be willing, however, to bear with Mr. Henderson if it were clear that he were only presenting a summary of critical attitudes and an analysis of several contemporary poets in their relation to society—and only this. But there is the constant, though evasive, suggestion that Mr. Henderson is propounding a thesis, yet so ambiguously is it stated and maintained that the reader remains uncertain to what degree he may give his assent. Mr. Henderson is conscious of the difficulty that confronts the poet in coming to terms with modern society ; he is fully aware that the poet must come to some kind of terms, and that the Romantic answer was, after all, an evasion. In the closing paragraph of the book Mr. Henderson states that ' . . . it is not primarily the business of the poet to be a politician, so much as to interpret imaginatively the crisis that is taking place in the mind of man. But he will be unable to do this unless he sees the world in his time as it is, and unless he shares to the full the life of his own age.' One will hardly venture to dissent from this

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as it stands, but having read Mr. Henderson's book, it is necessary to question what he means by sharing the life of one's age to the full. His recurring insistence cannot but compel the reader's attention to the question as one to which Mr. Henderson intends to give an answer. But none is forthcoming. The most that Mr. Henderson does is to make suggestions in other places that must raise doubts in the reader's mind as to the nature of the participation.

In the first chapter Mr. Henderson states that ' fine living does not depend upon poetry, as Richards and Leavis assert ; it depends in the last analysis upon the social organization without which there could be no poetry and no Cambridge where Messrs. Richards and Leavis can live finely.' To say that social organization is essential to fine living is about as indisputable as to say that existence is necessary for fine living. But social organization after all exists in the relations between individuals whose individuality is not lost but confirmed in any true society. To say, then, as Mr. Henderson does elsewhere, that ' the fate of the individual and our entire culture depends not so much upon self-knowledge, important as this may be, as upon the direction taken by the social and political events of our time ' seems to be placing the responsibility in the wrong place. That this insistence on the primary cultural responsibility of social organization will lead to conclusions which, to many readers, must seem unfortunate is soon apparent, for Mr. Henderson, speaking of Minority Culture, says ' . . . if our culture were exclusively in the keeping of those whose only business it was to live finely and to preserve it from every vulgar contact, it would soon die of anæmia.' The implication here is, of course, that Minority Culture consists in withdrawal and not in the application of relevant and discriminating value judgments. Quotations might be multiplied to indicate that Mr. Henderson's idea of sharing in ' present-day realities ' is at least a generous one.

Yet there are passages which at first might seem to define more narrowly Mr. Henderson's position. Speaking of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and the Jacobean dramatists he says that they ' did not represent themselves as birds or clouds or flowers, but were content to be men living in the world of men. And by " content " I mean that they accepted the human lot and did not try to escape it. However much they despaired of mankind, the poets who

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followed the disintegration of the mediæval unity and the eclipsed hopes of the Renaissance still faced the real world.' If this says anything at all it certainly does not answer how a poet to-day, living in a completely changed society, could share life to the full and still retain his integrity. Nor is the analysis of Hopkins, Yeats, D. H. Lawrence and Eliot enlightening on this question beyond showing how these particular poets have *not* made a full participation. But if the reader looks for more unambiguous definition of what Mr. Henderson means by sharing in this ' dynamic life ' he is not likely to find it. The trouble, one cannot help suspecting, is that Mr. Henderson is not quite the lone wolf he would like to be taken for. The second chapter of the book, on Marxist critical theory, does indeed make a sustained effort at independence, but Mr. Henderson has hardly achieved that reorientation which he desires.

Indeed, the very adjective ' dynamic ' should make the reader cautious. It is symptomatic of a suggestive tone which recurs repeatedly, as when, criticizing a poem of D. H. Lawrence's which speaks of ' the P. & O. and the Orient Line and all the other stinkers,' he facetiously asserts: ' It seems almost blasphemy to suggest here that Odysseus would have been only too glad of one of these masterpieces of engineering to withstand the rage of Poseidon and the assaults of Scylla and Charybdis, rather than his own frail bark. He was a wily man of many devices and would have been the first to appreciate the advantages of an Orient Line on his disastrous travels.'

The chapters which contain the analyses of individual poets cover well-ploughed ground and add nothing original. It is particularly distressing to be submitted once again to a psycho-analysis of poor Father Hopkins in which we are informed at some length that his interest in martyrs was not entirely healthy. It is difficult to see what practical significance such psycho-analytic muck-raking can possibly have except, perhaps, to indicate an aberration in much modern criticism more pronounced than anything likely to be stirred up in the process. T. S. Eliot also is made the subject of this author's psychological acumen. Mr. Eliot, we are informed, has found it impossible to love. The chapter on Yeats is meant to show that Yeats was class conscious ; the one on Lawrence to show that he was deficient in a social consciousness and didn't like Communists.

E. M. Bewley.

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FAIRIES IN BLOOMSBOHEMIA

PORTRAIT OF STELLA BENSON, by R. Ellis Roberts (*Macmillan, 15/-*).

It is a significant fact that Stella Benson regarded her diary, which she stipulated was to remain unpublished for forty years after her death, as more important than any of her published novels—significant because it raises the problem as to how far she may be considered an artist at all, how far a sociological specimen. ' The pretender,' she wrote in *Worlds within Worlds*, ' who cannot sufficiently buttress up his secret throne with lovers and friends would do well to keep a diary. A diary—even a cruelly honest diary—is a kind of home-made lover. In the pretender's diary, though he may not be justified, he is always forgiven ; though he may not be admirable, he is always visible . . . Diaries are like dreams, an inward consolation to the outwardly humiliated.' Now this is an extremely revealing quotation with reference both to Stella Benson's life and to her work ; though of course it does not necessarily follow that she had not many of the qualities that any serious artist ought to have.

To a point, she really was sensitive and intelligent—to the point, at least, of being a misfit. And it is not merely that she was forced to live so long among people ' whose highest idea of wit is a joke about being drunk and whose only outlet for intelligence is Bridge ' ; her conviction was as passionate as that of her old Mrs. Cotton that America and all it stood for was worse than death, as one may see by comparing the following from her letters:

> ' It seems to me that nothing is too strong to be spoken against the spreading of cheap art, cheap semi-education and cheap morals. If I were great I would still think it a worthy use of my art to take arms against that sea. As it is I can only say that the spreading spirit of which I speak is the thing that makes me thank God I shall not be alive in fifty years' time,'

with any of old Mrs. Cotton's imprecations such as this:

> ' It's a mechanical voice . . . speaking cheap and easy substitutes for truth—*so* irresistible, in a world in which truth

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has been so hard. Oh the corrupted young . . . it's not at all dreadful, Lena, to be old—now.
Would you rather have all that American ki-hindness than the glory of the unequal world?'

Stella Benson saw through the pretensions of the contemporary world with a bright bird-like worm-prodding intelligence, she impaled the Tams and Daleys of society with devastating finality. Yet all the time she half longed to be of them ; her mocking toughness arose from an agony of self-humiliation, which is the peculiar ant-like impetus from which her art springs. The sensitive souls, those who, like Lena, ' know wildness and darkness and danger,' are even more remorselessly pilloried than those who, like Daley, ' *want* to think the same thoughts as millions of Americans—because their thoughts are safe and good,' who don't want to ' sit apart and sneer ' ; are more ruthlessly pilloried, indeed, than those who, like Edna, are so stupid that feelings or thoughts are to them incomprehensible ; (' Hers was an entirely stationary mind ; she did not so much think as make small statements to herself . . . " Live and let live " said Edna, and she was better at letting live than she was at living.'). Of the self-dramatizing Benson heroes and heroines Edward is an emotional and intellectual cripple, Lena is a spiritual cripple, while Francis, the final self-caricature, is explicitly a physical cripple in whom she guys herself and the sterility of her isolation. And if the Tams and Daleys are contemptible too, at least they have the best of it in that they are relatively happy, so that although she despises Daley for being submerged in the American morass of cheap beauty and idiotic art, she yet endows her with many fetching characteristics that she herself would like to share. As Lena says, ' Honesty's my secret vice—knowing myself's my vice. Daley doesn't know herself—she never could mock at herself or punish herself or tear herself in pieces. Things are so easy for her—she's not alone—she's a universal—she fits in ' ; while Daley herself wistfully asks ' what's wrong with it anyway? What is there to sneer at in being good and loving and hygienic?'

Our Heroine, then, puts up a Brave Fight ; but the laughter is croaky that hides a broken heart. Lawrence said somewhere that to break a heart was to break the spontaneous flow of com-

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munion between people, and in this sense Stella really had a broken heart. One of the main themes of her books, which became more urgent as she grew older, was the impossibility of communion between people, all of whom live segregated in ' distinguished and divided worlds.' It is in this respect that she most obviously differs from E. M. Forster with whom, as a ' feminine counterpart,' she explicitly invites comparison. Like him she was intelligent about people and she was a whale for sensitiveness (consider the celebrated description of the birth of the foal in *Tobit Transplanted*), yet what is the use of being intelligent and sensitive if these qualities don't help you to live more adequately? They conspicuously helped Stella Benson to nothing more than a consciousness of failure for she could not believe, as Forster passionately believed though he too knew the difficulty of communication, in human relationships. For other people and for herself she at most had pity, at worst contempt, and so complete a deficiency in belief implies a deficiency in vitality too—an inadequacy as an artist. However objective and ruthless self-analysis may be—and the three-fold analysis of *Goodbye Stranger* with Clifford representing her isolation, Lena her self-humiliation and Daley her protective domesticity has at least the objectivity of an unsentimental bitterness—such self-analysis will produce something less than art if it is not stabilized by some kind of belief, the lack of which is attested, in *Goodbye Stranger*, by a fatal falsification in the sudden significance with which, towards the end, Mr. Lorne is invested. If one is convinced that the world is rotten and growing rottener, if one cannot believe in God and cannot trust human relationships what is there to fall back on but the fairies and a dancing wit? Neither makes a safe settee to collapse upon, the joints creak ominously as one's nonchalantly abandoned attitude precariously disguises the expectation of a shocking bump.

In the earliest fairy books there is a too patent juxtaposition of fantasy and realism combined with an insufferable archness, as in Forster's *Celestial Omnibus* stories, though naturally more feminine and kittenish. But in the last of these books, *This is the End*, the Secret Friend, the House of Living Alone, the other props to the separateness of the individual, are relinquished in favour of a stiff-lipped resignation.

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> ' I used to think that growing up was like walking from one end of the meadow to the other ; I thought that the meadow would remain and one had only to turn one's head to see it all again. But now I know that growing up is like going through a door into a little room ; and the door shuts behind one.'

In her very first book Stella Benson had written ' Sometimes I pose, but sometimes I pose as posing ' and isn't she here ' posing as posing '? At any rate the only comment one can make on the sort of growing up that *This is the End* represents is that it is precisely the reverse—a symptom of protracted adolescence, a disease from which she never quite recovered, for it is present not only in her persistent twinklebudisms, her private canine language, the pet-names for her pleurisy, for motor-cars and hot-water-bottles, and in the groups she uneasily mingled with, but in the tenor of her work as a whole. Even in her best, her funniest, most destructive books, *The Poor Man* and *Goodbye Stranger*, I suppose the ' dazzling ' wit—genuinely the product of an agile mind netting the butterflies of unexpected relations—cannot be reckoned as æsthetically ' serious ' ; though her pernickety masochism told her of the temptations to which the ' intelligent and sensitive ' are exposed:

> ' It would be no good to put on a hair shirt after one had realized that a hair shirt might be rather becoming and might—failing more concrete benefits—earn one a pat on the back from God . . .
> I am writing a bit but even that is prinking in a way. I say to myself " people will think that clever, therefore I also think it clever . . . " '

Certainly the preoccupation with the ' bone ' (' shut away, inside an inside-out sock, free from clamour and thought, resentment and preference '), with the point of view of people *as other people*, with people ' seeing by themselves,' with the problem of Us and Me, which figures so largely in the latest books, must be regarded as a weakening rather than a strengthening in integrity of purpose, for no writer who is worth his salt can ' withhold comment,' least of all as self-conscious a writer as Stella Benson ; it is the scope and sanity—the impartiality, all the traits we summarize as the

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impersonality—of the comment that counts, in other words it is the values the author believes in. The scope and sanity of Stella Benson's vision were limited not by her having a personality but by her inability to escape a personal manner, to separate the woman who 'suffered' from the creative mind. Whether you regard the inability as a deficiency of character or of civilization makes little odds, but beside it even Mr. Forster's most ambiguous whimsicality seems curiously untrivial. Stella Benson's 'comment,' in *Mundos*, did not really become less personal and if it appeared to do so to herself it was merely because she was seeking for ideological substitutes for her lack of belief. The little shafts of wit tickle the contemptible or pathetic denizens of Mundos and finally pierce Stella in the punchinello of Francis; but when the wit is extended beyond insects to ideas it stands confessed as intellectual persiflage, not incisive but verbose. Verbosity defeats its own ends; the impaling process must be managed neatly or not at all. Really the only positive that emerges from the call of bone to bone is the conviction that things temporal are comparatively unimportant. This though not a footling or insincere reflection is basically sentimental and unsatisfying because one has then to ask the question—Important or unimportant by what standards and with reference to what? It is a question to which Stella Benson never found any answer, which was perhaps the tragedy of her generation. Mrs. Woolf bumped her head at the end of the same cul-de-sac when she wrote *The Years*, though her way out had been through a poetic sensuousness rather than through a feminine wit and the pranks of exacerbated fairies. Of course Stella, as we have seen, was always something a bit less than an artist, a solitary fairy pirouetting in comically berserk desperation and in various minatory Canute-like postures before the advancing tide of our contemporary ignominy. Yet, failing a Forsterian conformity with 'the liberal tradition,' her escape from the ignominy was not much more unacceptable than the average—than that, say, of Mrs. Woolf herself or of Peter Warlock except in so far as these two had a streak of genius compared with her modest share of talent, and possibly just because she was less of an artist she was a more representative figure.

She had, anyway, for all her broken heart, a jaunty wiry energy in everyday affairs so that at the practical manifestations

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of her femininism—her work for the suffragettes and against licensed prostitution in Hong Kong—we certainly can't afford to smile. Indeed from the difficulties embodied in her life and in her funny but hopelessly unhappy books we can none of us be quite immune, and Mr. Ellis Roberts' pretentious volume has done her a disservice in elevating her among the literary giants and giantesses, beyond the reach of those she could pity and be pitied by. For the essence of her plight is that her ' elfin spirit ' *wanted* to believe if only she could have been strong enough to find something to believe in. But, like her Tanya, she was ' both too near and too far. She loved her neighbour as herself, because she found herself in her neighbour ; but if you *were* her neighbour, you found that she loved you no better than herself—which was not at all . . . Love of her neighbour was a thing felt stilly, thinly diffused among pitied lovers —puppies—parents—flowers—insects—even things . . . Real people (she thought) like to be nagged at, nagged at by love and other things. Only hills and rivers and flowers and animals are allowed to be free—not to ask for anything.' Yet how could a sympathy with dumb beasts and inanimate things bring Stella hope or relief when she herself was inescapably human and when the one thing one can be certain of about animals and things is that they are *not* human but unanswerably *other* and remote? The sympathetic portrayal of Seryozha the child of nature, and the tenderness towards persons such as Wilfred Chew that, almost for the first time, enters into *Tobit Transplanted,* is her ' illusory salvation from an illusory devil, her deepest anchor to normality, her licence to believe herself a woman plucked out of shameful fairyhood, her defence against being an outlaw and alone ' ; it is the voice of the prodigal daughter crying in vain for the caressing arms of a humanity that, along with herself, she had persistently withered with contumely. Crying in vain because, although she came tardily to recognize ' the humanity of humanity,' she never learned to accept it. The pretence of Separateness, or the pretence of Togetherness—what were they in the long run but the most pitiful instances of the incurable and inexhaustible vanity of mankind? ' Nothing's so very sacred as all that to any of us really,' says Seryozha, ' nothing except our vanity . . . And when we're dead, our vanity's dead too, damn it all, so—what of it?'

Perhaps it is not difficult to understand why those people of

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her generation and ours who peek at the world through the spy-glass of their chronically sore vanities—as we have most of us done at one time or another—should have taken Stella Benson to their hearts ; it is less easy to understand why the literary pundits should have been content to accept her as an accomplished artist, as an author of major contemporary importance.

W. H. MELLERS.

CRITICAL GUIDANCE AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

THE PRESENT AGE FROM 1914 (INTRODUCTIONS TO ENGLISH LITERATURE, Vol. V), by Edwin Muir (Cresset Press, 6/-).

One approaches this book with pleasant expectations and some apprehension. A book by Mr. Muir must, one is sure, be very different from the kind of thing that such a title would ordinarily lead one to expect ; and yet the difficulties and temptations in the way of the enterprise indicated by the title, especially when this is to figure in an academic series of ' Introductions,' are so formidable. The aim of the series is, the General Editor tells us,

> ' to enable anyone who wishes, to get a clear idea of any one period by reading with a certain degree of fervour for a year . . . '

To expect that literary historians should be original critics is to expect with little justification in experience ; but certainly an introduction to contemporary literature, if it is to go any way towards fulfilling the function assigned it, or to be worth anything at all, must be written by a critic who is both able and ready to make sharp and boldly explicit discriminations regarding value and significance—who is, in fact, intent on making them.

Although Mr. Muir says (p. 143) that ' this book is concerned with history rather than with criticism,' his practice shows that he knows that criticism is his essential business ; and it is because of his critical qualifications that his book stands in a class apart from the usual industrious register of names and titles (see, *e.g.*, the little productions of Mr. A. C. Ward). Because he is an intelli-

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gent critic of particular authors he is able to illuminate his chosen field with comparative generalities about periods; for example:

> 'In Victorian times the imaginative writer could be popular only by writing loosely. It may be said that to-day he can be widely popular only by writing falsely' (p. 30).

One's disagreements with his particular judgments are often of a kind one expects to be brought to in any profitable reading of criticism, and to disagree isn't necessarily to impugn his services as an 'introducer.' For instance, when he says (p. 89) of the best things of Hopkins,

> 'There is nothing for weight and volume in the poetry of his time to set beside them, excepting perhaps some lines of Browning,'

I exclaim at what seems to me the indefensible compliment to Browning, but I shouldn't think of suggesting that, because of it, the reader capable of profiting by Mr. Muir's guidance over Hopkins will profit any the less. Again, while applauding the way in which Mr. Muir, comparing the three poets, insists on Eliot's pre-eminence. I think that he at the same time does Yeats an injustice by appearing to bring him down to one level with Pound (for I take Yeats to be very much the greater poet of the two); nevertheless, I shouldn't say that the introduction the reader gets to Yeats is insufficient—Mr. Muir says some very acute and interesting things, and, thus introduced, Yeats should be able to look after himself.

But a difference in valuation does, where Pound is concerned, lead me to judge that Mr. Muir here misdirects his reader unfortunately. If *Mauberley* deserves no higher rating than Mr. Muir gives it, then I think Pound must be a less interesting poet than he suggests. To direct the reader to the earlier poems (see p. 65), except by way of *Mauberley*, seems to me to be doing Pound an ill service. But then I value *Mauberley* more highly than Mr. Muir does. Referring to Mr. Eliot's introduction to *Selected Poems*, he says that he cannot admit that *Mauberley* is 'genuine tragedy, or a criticism of life in the best sense.' The terms, of course, haven't any precise values, but I am convinced that the difference between Mr. Muir and Mr. Eliot derives from a failure of apprecia-

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tion on the part of Mr. Muir. Discussing the *Cantos* he says, very relevantly, that Social Credit ' is not a substitute for a genuine criticism of life, any more than Dialectical Materialism is.' The point about *Mauberley* is that while technique in that poem is not (as so often in Pound) merely that of the skilled verse-maker, but subserves the poet's most serious reactions to the world he lives in, the seriousness is so radical as to preclude even a suggestion of any such substitute for a ' criticism of life ' as Social Credit is, along with other superficial egotisms and insistences, in the *Cantos*. Pound, for once, is impersonally serious almost in spite of himself, and, though something must be conceded to Mr. Muir's limiting criticisms, the reader who responds to the deep resonances (' vacuos exercet aera morsus ') of those most moving and technically consummate sections which may be said to constitute the personal core of the poem—' *For three years diabolus in the scale* ' and ' *For this agility chance found* '—and who feels the relation between these sections and the rest, will not hesitate to talk of ' tragedy ' in connection with the poem as Mr. Eliot does. Is even the satire of *Yeux Glauques* and ' Siena mi fe ; disfecemi Maremma ' the satire of the Pound whose Hell (see Mr. Muir, p. 80) is ' *for other people*, the people we read about in the newspapers, not for oneself and one's friends '? To state it at the lowest, time is felt too profoundly in this poem to permit of Pound's usual egotism. In saying ' tragedy ' Mr. Eliot indicated the unique place of *Mauberley* in Pound's work. The peculiar difficulty of approach that the poem would appear to offer makes insistence on its uniqueness the more politic when one aims at getting due recognition for Pound.

But this is the kind of argument one expects to be provoked to as a part of the profit of reading an interesting critic ; no comment I have yet made is intended as a serious adverse criticism of the value of Mr. Muir's book for its purpose. Where I have, I think, serious criticism to urge is where he makes comparisons between the phase of poetic history represented by Eliot and that represented by Auden and Spender:

> ' But society went on falling apart with a fitful and alarming acceleration, and the generation of Auden and Spender could no longer see any choice but to hasten the process and work for a new order ' (p. 34).

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Mr. Muir has some admirable critical pages on Auden, but he nowhere makes the point that Auden's representative quality is not the altogether respectable thing, and cannot be adequately discussed in the creditable terms, suggested in the quoted sentence. Auden is representative in belonging to a period that doesn't permit its talents to develop into representative significance as Eliot has it. An Introduction to the Present Age that should really give the guidance offered would discuss those characteristics of the age, especially as focussed in the literary world, which make Auden, if we judge him in his writings, as essentially immature at over thirty as he was at eighteen.

I can see, of course, difficulties in the way of Mr. Muir's embarking on such a discussion in his book. That he shouldn't say bluntly that Day Lewis isn't a poet at all and his being taken as a leader of a Poetic Renascence is a characteristic absurdity of the age seems to me a related failure. For Mr. Muir doesn't, I think, really disagree with me about Day Lewis—as he does, I'm afraid, about Spender. Not that I am for a moment accusing him of a politic economy of critical frankness. I think rather that he is unwittingly illustrating the need of critical help his postulated reader may be presumed to stand in. If so experienced a critic as Mr. Muir finds it hard to maintain a policy of ' sharp and boldly explicit discrimination ' in the face of contemporary literature, the postulated green explorer is likely to put in more than a year's reading, however fervent, without profiting much by experience.

Actually—and this is my major criticism of his book—Mr. Muir did not prescribe that policy for himself, at any rate with the intensity that seems to me appropriate. In fact, his dissent from the prescription, and his reply to my criticism, may perhaps be found implicit in a phrase he throws out in referring (in flattering terms) to my own work—he speaks of its ' narrow temper.' In any case, I think that a more rigorous and exclusive spirit would have increased the value of his book for its expressed purpose. Does it really help the inexperienced reader to be told that the Georgian movement produced ' a number of poets of great interest' ? I don't suppose that Mr. Muir has substantially more use for Squire, Shanks, Drinkwater, Freeman and company than I have myself, but there is a misleading absence of astringency in his descriptive references to them.

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And, as a matter of fact, I believe that an absence of an insistently and rigorously discriminative spirit in comment and reference does tend to merge into a laxity of essential judgment. For instance, not only is Mr. Muir not astringent in dealing with the Sitwells ; he seems to me absurdly respectful towards them. That is, I disagree with his valuation and I think he is wrong. I could go on enumerating instances. And in general I am convinced that the reader who comes away from the book feeling that he ought to be as respectful towards as many poets as Mr. Muir suggests has had difficulties that lie in the way of his development reinforced.

In having to deal with fiction in the space at his disposal Mr. Muir is of course faced with a desperately difficult task. My own task as a reviewer I propose to simplify unfairly by picking on the places where I especially wish to ejaculate disagreement. A number of them are conveniently brought together in this sentence (p. 153):

> ' . . . one cannot help feeling that the age of *Ulysses, Sons and Lovers, Tarr, Mrs. Dalloway, Men and Wives,* and *Nightwood,* is a great age of the English novel.'

I can see why *Tarr* should have been a ' good thing ' among the best tipsters when my generation refilled the universities in 1919, but it seems to me very far from being the achieved masterpiece, or the highly significant work, that Mr. Muir suggests. (He is altogether too kind to Wyndham Lewis—*Time and Western Man* and company are not really books but bluffs). Then the book Mrs. Woolf should be represented by is, surely, not *Mrs. Dalloway* but *To the Lighthouse*? As for *Men and Wives,* the reputation enjoyed by Miss Compton Burnett has yet to be explained to me. But it is Mr. Muir's endorsement of *Nightwood* that most, I think, needs protesting against. Mr. Eliot's superlative exaltation of that books seems to have imposed it generally—it goes down to posterity a classic. Yet the piece of it that Mr. Muir quotes merely confirms my conviction that it is both bogus, in an innocent way, and dismally boring, a representative product of the post-Joyce, post-Eliot transition-Parisian-American cultural milieu, almost touching in the naïve sophistication of its interest in Evil. Still, I have to confess that Mr. Muir has had, so far as I know, all the reviewers

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with him. There has been an apparent unanimity too about *Maurice Guest*, by Henry Handel Richardson, which Mr. Muir calls (p. 131) ' probably the last great novel in the traditional style which has appeared in English '—' it remains as astonishing to-day as when it was first published.' What is astonishing to me is the reputation of the book, which I find disqualifyingly melodramatic, naïve and incompetent.

About Arnold Bennett Mr. Muir is admirably severe (I wish he had been as firm about Mr. Walpole). He is also salutary on the fashionable detective-fictioneers:

> ' Their brilliance is the most vulgar thing in contemporary literature ; their wit is execrable . . . '

These instances do not fairly offset the adverse suggestion of the foregoing paragraph, but they must suffice as a reminder that Mr. Muir is a vigorously independent critic—which no follower of his reviewing is likely to have forgotten. The trouble is that to-day, when standards disappear beneath the multiplying masterpieces and significant works, and the conferring by an ancient university of a doctorate upon Mr. P. G. Wodehouse evokes nothing but applause, not even the most vigorous and leisured of critics is likely to have found time and energy to make all the critical decisions that the cultivated person is supposed to have made, or to be capable of making after a certain bestowal of leisure upon varied perusals. The more necessary a form, then, of critical co-operation—the ' common pursuit of true judgment '—is the sharp challenge. I will end with one more: has Mr. Muir really read through and critically digested Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality* (see p. 176), which the writer of a conscientious adverse review once told me had ' cost him more pain to get through than any other book he had ever tackled '? There are too many of these reputations.

F. R. Leavis.

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MR. WILSON KNIGHT

THE BURNING ORACLE, by G. Wilson Knight (O.U.P., 12/6).

The title of this book is a quotation from Byron's *Sardanapalus*, 'Thou true sun! The burning oracle of all that lives . . . '; the sub-title is 'Studies in the Poetry of Action,' and the book itself is a collection of essays on Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Pope and Byron. Mr. Knight's intention is to analyse the work of these writers with a view to discovering its relation to Christianity on the one hand, and the sexual instinct on the other; the most profound literature, in his view, relying on a reconciliation of these two elements. Whether the importance of the *agape-eros* centre (to resort to Mr. Knight's idiom) depends upon its being the mainspring of the best literature, or whether the value of a literary work is judged by its exhibiting, of failing to exhibit, the *agape-eros* centre as its main axis of reference, never becomes clear. It is perhaps not a fair question in any case; but the reader may be assisted in determining his own attitude on this point by the bibliography of modern literature conforming to the required criticism volunteered by Mr. Knight: including Tennyson, Browning, *The Dynasts*, *The Waste Land* and *Triumphal March*, O'Casey's *Within the Gates*, and John Cowper Powys's *Glastonbury Romance*, 'perhaps the greatest work of our generation'; on the other hand, he may not.

It is perhaps fairest to Mr. Knight to discount his metaphysical programme and consider his analyses of the individual authors for what local value they have. Remarks of his own partly justify such a proceeding: 'We must, however, beware of any facile definition of the relation borne by poetic art to ethics, sexual or political'; and, 'The world-view of a poet is now to be distinguished finally from the type of poetic expression it dictates.' One is reminded by such remarks that Mr. Knight is the man who wrote *The Wheel of Fire*. And in fact this book is valuable in much the same way as *The Wheel of Fire* was valuable, though to a lesser degree: an intelligent and properly-equipped critic can make profitable use of the material, and even of the suggested lines of approach, here accumulated. Mr. Knight's catholic enthusiasm tends to obscure his thesis in a welter of trivialities: the essay on Pope, for example, includes a close analysis of *Windsor*

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Forest, The Rape of the Lock, Eloisa to Abelard and *The Dunciad*, and a paraphrase and analysis of each of the *Essay on Man* and the *Essay on Criticism*. This eclecticism results from, and illustrates, Mr. Knight's misdirection of interest. A poem like *Eloisa to Abelard*, for example, provides him with much powder and shot for his argument about the reconciliation of sexual and religious interests ; and he is able to point to certain qualities in the verse considered as poetry. But only by a critical sleight-of-hand does he treat *The Dunciad* on equal basis as also exhibiting certain qualities as poetry ; ignoring the fact that the qualities exhibited by *The Dunciad* are considerably more significant to a literary critic than those exhibited by the earlier poem, and it is from that consideration that he, as critic, should have started. Occasionally he has to strain every nerve to bring some particularly penetrating remark on, for example, Pope's humour, into line with his general argument, contriving thereby only to obscure its point.

Thus one goes through the book marking passages of interest, coming upon two pages on Spenser (13 and 14):

> ' There is an addition of image to image, of verbal music to verbal music, a diffusion rather than concentration, an essentially stanzaic sequence, but no complex intertwisted multiplication of significances . . . Often Spenser seems more interested in his abstract doctrine than his critical world ; or, if his world grips him, he seems to forget, for a stanza or two, his message, which is temporarily smothered by the luxuriant impressionism . . . *The Fairy Queen* is an eye-feast, an ear-feast, a mind-feast, but it is not a shared action, it is without dramatic suspense. People do things, but at a distance, like figures on a tapestry.'

But a page or two later we find

> ' Spenser's expressly *gentle* humanism . . . nevertheless itself draws him finally nearer to the consistently trusting humanists, Lyly, Shakespeare, and Pope, than to the variously forceful distrusters, Marlowe and Milton.'

The affinities with Milton, in the use of language and imagery, and even in psychopathology, that Mr. Knight's own analysis of Spenser reveals, are ignored, in favour of the implications of one isolated aspect of the poet's ideology.

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In the essay on Pope, the main fact is, as I have suggested already, a lack of proportion. There are some very interesting remarks on the Sporus portrait (p. 186 ff.):

> ' Whatever or whoever the human prototype this is scarcely a rounded study ; but neither is there any single *idea* behind its creation, as there is, for example, behind Sir Epicure Mammon. It is caught straight from contact with those human personalities stated by Pope himself to be irreducible to concepts or to principles of reason . . . Pope distils, compresses, and ejects through one person the living essence of a whole poisoned society . . . Yet the creation is paradoxical since its very intensity is set to constitute a condemnation of non-being. Sporus is vigorously inactive and powerfully a nothing.'

The analysis on which these comments are based is more interesting than the comments themselves. But in the ensuing discussion on the justifiability of much satire from a Christian point of view, the significant connection of this kind of satire with, say, the third *Moral Essay* on the one hand, and with *The Dunciad* on the other, is quite lost. The necessary material is there in the essay, but Mr. Knight is more concerned to justify Pope's kind of humour in the light of the *Essay on Man* than to allow his interest to be directed by the quality of the poetry.

It is not surprising, then, when he finds Byron's affinities to lie with Shakespeare rather than Pope—' Byron's poetic interests are, like Shakespeare's, at once subjective, personal, social, political, naturalistic, and cosmic '—and this on the showing mainly of *Marino Faliero* and *Sardanapalus* ; in this connection he refers to Byron as ' a dramatist of Shakespearean calibre '—a remark whose effect is not so much to raise our opinion of Byron as a dramatist as to lower our opinion of Mr. Knight as a critic. His main interest is plainly in certain ethical conceptions suggested by Byron, but he is careful to support his contention with analysis of the verse at relevant points. This part of the book, with that on Pope, is an interesting object-lesson in the way in which practical criticism can be made to subserve an already orientated interest, and an indication that bad poetry has a ' technique ' just as much as good. The ethical implications of literary criticism cannot be circumvented by operating purely in terms of technical analysis ;

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that a poet does what he wants to do is no proof that what he wants to do is worth doing. An abstract from Byron's verse may reveal an ethic similar to Shakespeare's (Mr. Knight contrives to make it do so); and Byron may express what he has to say quite adequately (as Shakespeare does) ; but the relation between Byron's ethics and his technique of expression is of so different a kind from the comparable relation in Shakespeare as to make all the significant difference from the point of view of literary value.

Perhaps the most disturbing essay is that on Milton. One is ordinarily inclined to respect Mr. Knight as something of an untutored genius with an *idée fixe* whose singularity of interest may throw some new light on the old familiar faces. In the essay on Milton his accumulation of material constitutes the most damning indictment of Milton I have yet seen, apart from Dr. Tillyard's book. He analyses Milton's imagery intensively, showing its insistent efforts to make the fluid rigid, to make the natural artificial, and to preserve a purely surface consistency ; and draws all the relevant implications, not the least of which is that Milton fails signally in the realization of the Christianity-eros balance. Yet in spite of this Mr. Knight insists, quite illogically, on Milton's greatness as a poet, specifically pointing out that he doesn't draw the same conclusions as certain ' other critics,' and carefully referring in conciliatory terms to Messrs. Eliot and Leavis on the one hand, and (much more conciliatory) to Messrs. C. S. Lewis, Tillyard and Charles Williams on the other: a proceeding he seems to find unnecessary in other essays where his findings are more in accordance with the accepted habits of critical thinking. We recall that for each of us personally, and for the literary-critical world in general, Mr. Knight was one of the major influences in reorientating the stereotyped approach to Shakespeare ; it is to be hoped that his original approach will not be used in the interests of pedestrian orthodoxy in other fields.

R. O. C. WINKLER.

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POPE ON THE UPSWING

THE TWICKENHAM EDITION OF THE POEMS OF ALEXANDER POPE, Vol. IV : IMITATIONS OF HORACE, Ed. by John Butt (Methuen, 15/-).

THE POETICAL CAREER OF ALEXANDER POPE, by Robert Kilburn Root (Princeton University Press and Humphrey Milford, 11/6).

Even those who cannot help an inner sinking when they contemplate the enshrinement of poets in monuments of scholarship will agree that the new edition of Pope, of which Volume IV is the first to be issued, seems likely to justify itself. Pope is pre-eminently a poet who calls for a scholarly apparatus, and Elwin and Courthope didn't make a final job of it. The apparatus in the present volume has been introduced with judgment. The reader will be glad to have the original texts of Horace and Donne set, page by page, over against Pope's ' imitations ' ; the necessary information about each work is handily placed ; and intelligent economy has been exercised in the matter of footnotes.

Yet the prominence of the footnotes gives an edge to the question whether three sentences above a damaging concession wasn't made at Pope's expense. Actually, when the volume containing the *Dunciad* appears the proportion of footnotes to text in, say, Book III of that poem will probably turn out to be not notably less, and I do not think that, there, any adverse conclusion should be admitted. Nevertheless, a reading of the present volume does bring home to one that a great deal of Pope's work was of its time in a way that irremediably impoverishes its life for us: too great a part in it is played by topicalities and particularities that must now remain mere references to footnotes. The brilliance is everywhere, but the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* is the only piece in the book of which one can unhesitatingly say that it deserves to be current as a poem of classical standing and an illustration of Pope's genius.

The very positive culture that saw itself as Augustan, and expressed itself characteristically in the habit of ' imitation ' didn't bring the best out of Pope. Wide-ranging as were the freedoms he permitted himself, ' imitation ' didn't favour the controlling

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and directing of the dispersed effects of his satire by dominant drives of interest ; it favoured, rather, a weak discursiveness, an exasperating bluff of continuity, and some of the less agreeable manifestations of Pope's interest in couplets.

The cultural advantages represented by the Horatianizing appear rather in work not included in this volume ; in, for instance, the best of the Moral Essays—notably in the one of which Professor Root says (p. 184):

> ' When one thinks of the *Epistle to the Earl of Burlington* it is the picture of Timon's villa, rather than the didactic thesis that utility and good sense are the indispensable foundation of good taste, that at once springs to the memory.'

Of the ' didactic thesis ' Mr. Root says no more. Yet the most remarkable thing about the epistle—that which makes it representative of Pope's greatness—is the way in which the malicious vivacity of the passage on Timon's villa passes, with perfect sureness, into the solemn didacticism of those closing paragraphs in which the substance of the ' thesis '—

> 'Tis Use alone that sanctifies Expense,
> And Splendour borrows all her rays from Sense

—is realized imaginatively in a rich, varied and triumphant poetry. This poetry, the more significant by reason of where it comes, could have been written only by a great poet whose imagination was informed, and whose pen controlled, by a fine and generally shared ideal of civilized order—an ideal that had some basis in actuality. No analysis of Pope's art that doesn't lead to such considerations as these can come near his greatness or even do justice to his technical skill and his cleverness.

So it is that, though Mr. Root gives a good deal of space to discussing Pope's technique, he doesn't really get much said. He rightly insists on the variety of the Augustan couplet as handled by Pope, but is unable to go far in describing the nature and conditions of that variety. His book, in fact, is not what the dust-jacket says it is,

> ' a new interpretation and a fresh appraisal for modern readers of a famous poet whose reputation is now very decidedly on the upswing ' ;

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it is, rather, a now familiar kind of evidence that the change in taste that set in two decades ago has made itself felt even in conservative academic preserves.

Mr. Root's acceptance of Pope is complete, and the worst of complete acceptance is that it precludes appreciation. To show equal enthusiasm for the *Essay on Man* and the *Dunciad* is not really to advance the recognition of Pope's genius. Mr. Root calls attention to the prejudices and preferences of nineteenth-century taste that stand (or stood) between Pope and recognition—

> ' not a few modern readers, I imagine, would think that the temper of satire is alien to that of poetry '

and

> ' A generation ago literary historians of the eighteenth century spent much of their time in hunting for so-called " precursors " of romanticism '

—but, in the traditional way, he brackets the *Unfortunate Lady* with *Eloïsa* (they are ' in substance, if not in execution, romantic '), which no one could do who recognized the extraordinary distinction of the Elegy. True, of this he adds that

> ' Its literary virtues spring not from Pope's heart, but from his exquisite mastery of the art of poetic expression ' ;

but then (with Lytton Strachey and other good company) he finds the well-known couplet,

> Lo! where Mæotis sleeps, and hardly flows
> The freezing Tanais thro' a waste of snows,

worth exclaiming upon (and analysing) as an instance of that mastery. And the passages he quotes as ' poetry of a high order ' have usually little to distinguish them but an obvious poeticality.

But he has at any rate, while presenting his lecture-audiences (one presumes) with a useful selection of relevant information, exhorted them to find Pope a living and lively poet—though I myself think Pope better served by one's confining one's enthusiastic recommendation to a comparatively few things, *e.g.*, the *Elegy on the Unfortunate Lady*, *Epistles III* and *IV* in the *Moral Essays*, the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* and the fourth book of the *Dunciad*.

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As already intimated, Volume IV of the new edition contains the ' versifications ' of Donne's satires, and this relevant passage from the Introduction (p. 42) seems worth quoting:

> ' Pope's attention to Donne's *Satires* should not give any cause for surprise. Though he and his contemporaries may not have read Donne with the enthusiasm with which we read him to-day, certainly they read him. Tonson, the publisher, considered that there was sufficient demand for a new edition of the poems in 1714 ; and fifteen of them are found in Dryden's *Miscellany*, the most popular and representative anthology of the period, re-issued for the fifth time in 1727. Spence records that Pope held Donne's poetry in high repute . . . '

The liking for Donne may be correlated with this comment on Milton, which Spence also records (Mr. Root quotes it):

> ' The high style, that is affected in so much blank verse, would not have been borne, even in Milton, had not his subject turned so much on such strange out-of-the-world things as it does.'

How habitual was the Augustan assumption regarding the proper relation between poetry and the spoken language may be gathered from the following couplet, which occurs in the ' imitation ' of Horace Ep. I, Lib. II, but is Pope's unprompted contribution:

> What will a Child learn sooner than a song?
> What better teach a Foreigner the tongue?

That last argument could hardly have occurred to a defender of the Poet in the nineteenth century. It is of the essential strength of Pope that the point could seriously have been made of his own best poetry.

F. R. LEAVIS.

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